

How Easily Slaves Are Made

The Presence of Performativity in *Kindred* by Octavia Butler

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A Thesis Presented to The Department of Literature, Area Studies
and European Languages

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the MA Degree
Spring 2009

Summary

In this thesis Octavia Butler's *Kindred* is analysed with the use of Judith Butler's theory of performativity. As the protagonist is a black woman, *Kindred* is especially helpful in order to understand the racializing norms Butler mentions in *Bodies That Matter*. The thesis analyses the transformation in the female protagonist Dana's performativity in three stages: before the first time she is called to antebellum Maryland, while she is there, and after her final return home to California. By analysing Dana's racial, gender, and sexual performativity, it is possible to form an impression of her identity, and see how it changes when she is situated in a different discourse.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to my supervisor Rebecca Scherr for her inspiring classes, and for her support and encouraging feedback throughout the writing process.

My thanks also to the staff at the library at the Edith Cowan University in Bunbury, Western Australia for being so helpful and friendly and for giving me the opportunity to use their facilities freely while I was in Australia.

To my dear friend Hanna: thank you so much for helping me out with useful comments and suggestions on this thesis, as well as for being on hand for discussions, inspiration, advice and encouragement.

I would also like to thank my parents Espen and Guro for their never-ending support, and for always being so proud of me. And finally, to my husband Damon, thank you for looking after our son Max so I could do this!

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Introduction

Beware, all too often we say what we hear others say. We think what we are told that we think. We see what we are permitted to see. Worse, we see what we are told that we see. Repetition and pride are the keys to this. To hear and to see even an obvious lie again and again and again, maybe to say it almost by reflex, and then to defend it because we have said it, and at last to embrace it because we've defended it.

– Octavia Butler, 1998, from *Parable of the Talents*

This thesis will employ one Butler's theory on another Butler's novel, with the discussion of how Judith Butler's concept of 'performativity' is demonstrated in *Kindred* by Octavia Butler. My main project is to apply Judith Butler's theory to show how and why the main character in *Kindred* changes throughout the novel. My focal point will be to discuss the female protagonist Dana's identity as a free, modern woman compared to her idea of self in the process of becoming a slave in the antebellum American South. I am particularly interested in her racial identity, but as Judith Butler argues, one cannot study the different parts of one's identity separately, because sex, gender, sexuality and race are interacting elements in the process of identity formation. Therefore, I intend to study how all these aspects of Dana's identity emerge in her performativity.

Although Judith Butler leaves room for rather radical interpretations of her theories, I find that her use of the term *performativity* to explain sex, gender, sexuality and race is helpful in order to understand these important parts of people's identity. Furthermore, I believe that her analyses can be used to create a matrix for future thinking about the concepts of gender, race and sexuality, especially in relation to fighting discrimination and oppression. Butler's main goal is to expand people's ideas of normality, which would be a step in the right direction towards solidarity, cooperation and equality in this world.

In chapter one I will discuss in detail J. Butler's theory of performativity. In short, she argues that sex, gender, race and sexuality are constructed upon the repetition of acts, and performativity is the combination of all these repeated acts. These acts are dependent on the norms in the society, but it is important to notice that norms in turn are upheld *through* the repetition of the acts. If we are to believe this theory, we have to accept that not only gender and sexuality, but also race and sex are not something people *are* or *have*, but what they *do*

or *perform*, and that this is an involuntarily performance shaped by powerful mechanisms around us. This concept may be difficult to grasp for some, especially because the dominant idea is that it is one's identity (whether it is one's gender, sexual or racial identity) that controls one's acts and not the other way around.

One consequence of this theory is that a change in environment or discourse, may lead to a change in one's behavioural patterns and principals, i.e. one's identity. Few want to admit that they are so easy to influence that they will think or act differently if they started to live in different surroundings. This is where literature can be helpful, and *Kindred* in particular, because the story is structured around a kind of time-travel, which makes this novel exceptional at demonstrating the vicissitudes of performativity. In this analysis of the novel, I will discuss how Octavia Butler uses the protagonist, a modern, independent woman, to show her readers how easily people are influenced by the power mechanisms in society, and in particular by the mechanisms at work in the oppression of one group of people by another.

Problems with race, class and gender are recurring themes in Octavia Butler's series and novels as she often explores the power relationships between a suppressed race or species and their oppressor. A typical goal for her work is also to point out and find solutions to problems such as poverty, wars and environmental issues. After her death, a close friend, Tananarive Due, describes Butler and her writing in the following way:

It is a cliché to say that she was too good a soul, but it's true. What she really conveyed in her writing was the deep pain she felt about the injustices around her. All of it was a metaphor for war, poverty, power struggles and discrimination. All of that hurt her very deeply, but her gift was that she could use words for the pain and make the world better.

(http://www.seattlepi.com/books/260959_butlerobit26www.html)

In most of her work, the characters exist in a future environment. In order to understand human nature and imagine what problems lay in the future, Butler insists on looking at history. In the article 'A few rules for predicting the future' Butler claims:

Of course, writing novels about the future doesn't give me any special ability to foretell the future. But it does encourage me to use our past and present behaviors as guides to the kind of world we seem to be creating. The past, for example, is filled with repeating cycles of strength and weakness, wisdom and stupidity, empire and ashes. To study history is to study humanity. And to foretell the future without studying history is like trying to learn to read without bothering to learn the alphabet. (166)

The importance of knowing one's history is a central aspect of *Kindred*, as I will point out throughout this thesis.

Kindred was first published in 1979, and is considered to be Butler's most successful novel. It is a popular novel for discussions in women's studies and African American studies, but it is also loved by Butler's regular science fiction audience. The novel's protagonist is Dana, a black, independent African American woman, who lives in the California of 1976. One day, while she is moving in with her white husband Kevin Franklin, she gets dizzy and falls, but suddenly finds herself in the Maryland of the early nineteenth century. She saves a white boy from drowning in a river, and then discovers that someone is pointing a gun at her. All of a sudden she is back in California again, but wet and covered in mud from the river bank. The dizziness and transportation to this other place are repeated six times throughout the novel. It turns out that the boy is Rufus Weylin, the son of a slaveholder, who apparently is Dana's forefather. For some reason, he is able to summon Dana whenever he is in danger, and she is forced to rescue him until he has fathered the baby that will grow up to become Dana's great great-grandmother. When Dana is in mortal danger, she faints and wakes up in California again. Although her stays in Maryland have lasted for weeks or months, only minutes and hours have passed in her own time. From that that first travel on, her life changes dramatically. Not only is she forced to move back and forth in time, she also experiences first hand slavery and torture. The narration is so vivid and the images so clear that the reader is quickly drawn into the story along with Dana. Through this character's narration, the reader is invited to feel some of the power structures that influence a black woman's identity process and performativity. The novel also demonstrates how the rules of performativity change with time and place, an aspect Judith Butler does not take into consideration in *Bodies That Matter*.

Octavia Butler has said in interviews that she resents placing her work into specific genres. One reason she gives is that labeling a novel means depriving it of a wide audience, as many people believe that all books in one genre are the same, so there is no incentive for reading more books from a genre they do not like. In the discussion of *Kindred* however, it is interesting to mention that Butler applies the structure of the traditional slave narrative, but breaks with the content, as Christine Levecq argues in her article 'Power and Repetition'. The traditional slave narratives were used as political tools in the abolitionist movement. As a result, the stories typically depicted unambiguous hatred towards the slave owners and

solidarity among the slaves. *Kindred* presents a more complex and ambiguous picture of the institution of slavery. Levecq writes:

By calling up almost explicit references to Douglass's *Narrative*, and subverting them in a more nuanced exploration of the relationship between slave and slave owner, *Kindred* imparts its view of more contorted, controversial movements guiding history than the prototypically oppositional and linear slave narrative allowed. (Levecq, 544)

In *Kindred*, when she spends time as a slave on the Weylin farm, the protagonist is often surprised by the lack of unity, the high degree of competition and sometimes open hatred among the slaves. Dana also struggles with her own feelings towards the slave owner Rufus, because she might hate him one moment, but then forgive him and enjoy his company in the next. Because of these feelings and her relationship with the other slaves, Dana struggles for a long time with her own idea of self, a discussion I will return to in chapter three. O. Butler thus uses the structure of a slave narrative to draw attention to the moments where the story in *Kindred* does not follow those of canonized slave narrators such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. These moments will prove to be of great significance in Dana's identity formation.

By describing the varied and contradictory relationships in the slave community, Octavia Butler also shows that there are more nuances in the world than black and white, which is exactly what Judith Butler argues in her work. I will discuss how Octavia Butler with *Kindred* repeatedly demonstrates the concept of performativity, and how she also shows that the illusion of performativity is used actively as a tool of survival, but also a means for change.

1. Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity

After her first books, *Subjects of Desire* (1987) and *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler was criticized for ignoring the aspect of *race* in her theories on the formation of identity. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993) she repeatedly insists that race must be included in the study of the identificatory process. Although she attempts to do so in her analysis of Jennie Livingston's documentary *Paris is Burning* and Nella Larsen's novel *Passing*, it is difficult to find racial performativity and the effect of the racializing norms truly integrated in *Bodies That Matter*. I thus intend to develop Judith Butler's theory further by applying it to *Kindred*, because I believe the novel demonstrates to a great extent how sex, gender, sexuality and race are all incorporated in the identificatory process.

In her theories about identity J. Butler draws on and develops ideas from numerous philosophers and thinkers, from Hegel to Gayatri Spivak. In *Bodies That Matter*, Michel Foucault's historical analyses on multiple power mechanisms, Louis Althusser's concept of hailing/interpellation, Jacques Derrida's notion of citationality, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis, and John Langshaw Austin's speech act theory have been especially important. I will begin my account of Butler's theory with clarifying the terms *performativity* and *regulatory norms*, and with this description I find it helpful to include a brief presentation of Michel Foucault's ideas on power mechanisms. Next, I will show how Butler applies Louis Althusser's concept of *hailing*, also called *interpellation*, followed by a short description of Butler's use of *speech acts* and *resignification*. Finally I will discuss how Butler attempts to include 'race' into her theory, and suggest how I will use her ideas further in this thesis.

1.1 Performativity and regulatory norms/power mechanisms:

In *Bodies That Matter* Judith Butler seeks to show 'how power relations work in the formation of "sex"' (16). She argues that people – because of 'regulatory norms' – *become* rather than *are* a gender or sex. Butler claims that what constitutes one's identity, such as sex, gender, sexuality and race, are not constant, innate characteristics; it is rather something

that is *performed*. However, this is not a voluntary performance – we cannot simply choose an identity and perform it as if we were on a stage. Rather, she argues that people's performance is determined by the discourse which they are a part of. This discourse, regulatory norm, or power that is behind one's identity and performativity is not the will or law of a specific group of subjects, it is rather like an invisible *force* that develops from the repeated *acts* we all 'perform', and have been 'performing' throughout history. Thus, the discourse that controls the performativity is upheld by the repeated acts of the performativity.

[P]erformativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regulized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance. (*Bodies That Matter*, 95)

A great part of chapter three of this thesis will be concerned with how fear of pain and death together with humiliation work to create slaves and maintain the oppression of the black population in *Kindred*. Through the fear of being severely punished for misbehaving, the slaves were led to perform the tasks that the whites wanted them to do without protesting. It is the repetition of this pattern that has led both the white and the black population to believe that this was the way it should be, whites are superior to blacks and should rule; blacks must endure hard work, suffering and abuse.

Judith Butler argues that because the 'force of prohibition' stems from repeated acts, people do not always consciously recognize it as regulatory norms. More often, the norms are seen as *inevitable truths*, and for this reason the forces that control performativity become even more powerful and efficient. Thus far, most people will probably agree with Butler's analysis. However, Butler takes her argumentation further when she claims that even 'race', 'sex' and 'gender' are constructed concepts that have been formed because of what is considered to be 'true' about men and women, white people and black people. Butler seems to question the very existence of *bodies*, when she claims that even our bodies are formed by the regulatory norms. This may sound nihilistic, but she does not mean that we do not exist, but that contrary to what we think, there is no real reason for aligning people into categories such as 'man/woman' or 'black/white'. This categorization has been created by

discourse, but it has become significant because every person that is born is already labelled and has to carry out the performativity that comes with the category in which they are placed. However, if people started to acknowledge that all is discourse and not undeniable truths from nature's side, perhaps it would not be so important to behave in accordance with 'labels' such as *man* and *woman*, *black* and *white*. Butler says:

To problematize the matter of bodies may entail an initial loss of epistemological certainty, but a loss of certainty is not the same as political nihilism. On the contrary, such a loss may well indicate a significant and promising shift in political thinking. This unsettling of 'matter' can be understood as initiating new possibilities, new ways for bodies to matter. (*Bodies That Matter*, 30)

Because the black protagonist in *Kindred* is taken from modern times and has to live in the antebellum South, the novel demonstrates how the significance of race and skin colour has changed considerably over time. In the modern discourse of 1976, Dana's dark skin does not seem to be of great importance to the way she lives her life, in stark contrast to the experiences she has in the Maryland of the early 1800's. There is however a problem with Dana's attitude towards what constitutes her. In chapter two I will discuss how Dana seems to disregard the importance of her race, sex and sexuality in her everyday life in modern day California. The result is a feeling of solitude and displacement. Dana seems to dislike the way people perform their race, gender and sexuality, and her solution to this is to ignore these parts of her self completely. However, as race, sexuality and gender are important aspects of her identity, they cannot be discarded without being replaced by something else. That is probably not what Judith Butler has in mind either, but it is easy to misinterpret her theory in this way. From what I understand, Butler calls for a heightened awareness of the reasons behind our performativity, not in order to erase *the body*, but to open up for extended versions of it. Her ideas thus oppose the traditional, Western dichotomy – a system that builds on two opposites, with no variations in between. Butler's theory provides an alternative and open way of thinking about identity. Her view fits well with the Afrocentric perspective which black scholar Patricia Hill Collins insists on in *Black Feminist Thought*. Collins claims that it is the interaction of race, gender, sexuality and class that causes the oppression of black women, and in order to understand and solve their problems, it is important to take the connection between all these aspects into consideration. I will come back to the connection between Butler's theory and black feminist thought towards the end of this chapter.

1.2 Foucault and The Power of Truth

Butler's notion of a matrix of regulatory norms, in which certain truths have been produced and adopted by everyone, is significantly influenced by the work of Michel Foucault. One of his missions was to analyse the mechanisms of power in order to understand general, political power. Foucault believed that 'we all have power in our bodies' (*Power/Knowledge*, 99), however this does not mean that we are all powerful, only that we have become so integrated into a matrix of strategic power devices, that it is difficult to separate the body and mind from the power mechanisms. He argues that power over individuals is upheld because the individuals endorse it. In other words, the subdued individuals are essential for the existence of the power that suppresses them:

The individual, that is, is not the *vis-à-vis* of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle. (*Power/Knowledge*, 98)

Whereas Butler often refers to the regulatory norms as 'constraints' and 'prohibitions' that form people's performativity, Foucault's approach shows that power mechanisms are not simply a range of prohibitions. During his studies he discovered that repressive power – typically punishment and laws – is only a small part of the power mechanisms that we are a part of. Foucault argues that if repressive, negative power was the only mechanism at work, people would not accept it and maintain it. Thus in order to understand power, it is not sufficient to concentrate one's analysis on repression – and typically study the State or the Sovereign's power over its subjects. Instead, one must investigate parts of the society that appear irrelevant to the common notion of power. Foucault himself studied (among other things) penal systems and how the concepts of 'madness' and 'sexuality' came to be, and argues that the mechanisms that are at work in institutions such as the family, the church, schools, prisons and psychiatric asylums have been implemented into the practicing of power by the State. Foucault says:

One must [...] conduct an *ascending* analysis of power, starting, that is, from its infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then see how these mechanisms of power have been – and continue to be – invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc., by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination. (*Power/Knowledge*, 99)

To be able to free oneself from the power mechanisms, one must use the truth that is produced in its discourse against it: 'We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth' (*Power/Knowledge*, 93). In this thesis, I will discuss some of the many 'truths' that have been at work in the creation of the stereotypical *black woman*, especially 'truths' related to black women's bodies, sexuality and motherhood. The stereotype exerts strong influence on the identificatory process.

1.3 Interpellation/hailing

In the essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', Louis Althusser describes the concept of 'interpellation' or 'hailing', by which we are all recruited as subjects into ideology:

I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'function' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing. (*Lenin and Philosophy*, 118)

Althusser describes a scene in which a police officer calls out 'Hey, you there!' in the street, and the person he addresses or *hails*, recognizes that he is the one that is called, and turns around. The police officer represents *ideology*, and the person in the street represents all individuals who through hailing become subjects in ideology. Althusser's point is that we have all been hailed into ideology. The problem is that we all believe that we are not: 'As is well known, the accusation of being in ideology only applies to others, never to oneself' (*Lenin and Philosophy*, 119). Althusser's *ideology* is what Butler calls regulatory norms, and she argues that the identificatory process starts with a hailing that begins already before one is born:

Consider the medical interpellation which (the recent emergence of the sonogram notwithstanding) shifts an infant from an 'it' to a 'she' or a 'he', and in that naming the girl is 'girled', brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender. But that 'girling' of the girl does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout the various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this naturalized effect. The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm. (*Bodies That Matter*, 7-8)

This is one of several examples through which Butler aims to demonstrate that sex and gender are not something we are born with because of bodily features, it is rather something we become as we are hailed as a girl or a boy from the moment we are born. The midwife's exclamation, 'It's a girl' is an interpellation; the baby has been assigned a sex and will grow up in a discourse/ideology that has already decided how it (she) is supposed to be. Because of the fear of abjection and punishment, the baby will answer the call, and follow the 'instructions' it picks up from its surroundings. However, Butler disagrees with Althusser in that the subject automatically does exactly what is expected just because it is hailed. She argues that he fails to notice the *disobedient* subjects, who not necessarily refuse the 'law' or regulatory norms, but rather *rearticulate* it:

Where the uniformity of the subject is expected, where the behavioural conformity of the subject is commanded, there might be produced the refusal of the law in the form of the parodic inhabiting of conformity that subtly calls into question the legitimacy of the command, a repetition of the law into a hyperbole, a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who delivers it. (*Bodies That Matter*, 122)

Next, Butler shows how drag can be seen as a 'rearticulation of the law' in her analysis of Jennie Livingston's film *Paris is Burning*. I will show how the slaves in *Kindred* rearticulate the laws when they put up an act, and apparently answer the hailing, in front of their white masters, but behave differently in the presence of other slaves. This was the subtle start of an important resistance and struggle for the right to self-definitions. I leave this discussion for now, and revisit it again in chapter three.

1.4 Speech Acts and Resignification

Butler's theory can be used to uncover the discourse that forms us, and eventually open up for a wider definition of what is considered 'normal' and accepted by the social order that we all are a part of. One way to do this, is through 'resignification' or 'recitation'. For this part of her theory, she builds on ideas from Jacques Derrida and J. L. Austin. In 1955 Austin published the book *How To Do Things With Words* which lay the foundation for what was later called the speech act theory. Austin argued that most utterances are not said to state a fact, but to *perform* something. He differentiated between utterances that are descriptive, or constative, and those that are performative. For an utterance to be performative depends a

great deal on the discourse. A typical example is the sentence ‘I pronounce you husband and wife’. If this is uttered by a priest who is standing in front of a man and a woman in a church with witnesses present, it is very likely that the utterance is performative. By articulating these words, the priest is *marrying* the two people standing in front of him, thus s/he is doing something with words (however, it could be a rehearsal, in which case it would *not* be performative). Austin argues that because a performative utterance is so dependent on the surroundings, when it is taken away from its context, it suddenly does nothing: ‘According to Austin, in order for a statement to have performative force [...], it must 1) be uttered by the person designated to do so in an appropriate context; 2) adhere to certain conventions; and 3) take the intention(s) of the utterer into account’ (Salih, 90).

This is where Judith Butler disagrees with Austin, and the concept of recitation/resignification becomes important. In his essay ‘Signature Event Context’ Jacques Derrida counters Austin’s theory by claiming that all linguistic signs have the ability to be taken out of the context they were meant for and be given a new meaning, *re-cited*, and this possibility of relocation is in the essence of the sign (Salih, 91). Butler uses Derrida’s theory of recitation and combines it with the notion of performativity. She argues that citationality can be used as a strategy for changing the conditions for groups of people who are deviant from the hegemonic discourse. One example she brings up is the use of the term ‘queer’:

Within queer politics, indeed, within the very signification that is ‘queer,’ we read a resignifying practice in which the desanctioning power of the name ‘queer’ is reversed to sanction a contestation of the terms of sexual legitimacy. Paradoxically, but also with great promise, the subject who is ‘queered’ into public discourse through homophobic interpellations of various kinds *takes up or cites* that very term as the discursive basis for an opposition.[...] The hyperbolic gesture is crucial to the exposure of the homophobic ‘law’ that can no longer control the terms of its own abjecting strategies. (*Bodies That Matter*, 232)

Butler states that hate speech is performative, especially because of the impact hate speech can have on people’s ideas of themselves. ‘Queer’ has been used as a negative word about homosexuals. However, the term has recently been taken on by the gay community, and it is more and more often used with pride. It still means ‘homosexual’, but the meaning has been extended, and it has a more positive connotation, it has been *re-cited*. The result of this resignification is perhaps that a person does not need to feel intimidated by that word, or feel that one has been excluded from the ‘normal’ society. As Butler says in the quote above, a resignification of words that are originally used with the intention to hurt, suppress or even

seclude an individual or a group can be used as a strategy to stop the suppression, mainly because the *insignificance* of the term will be revealed.

Resignification of words can also be transferred to people. Butler uses *Paris is Burning* to exemplify such resignification. The cross-dressing men in the movie re-cite the ‘norm’ – with its gender ideals, ideas of glamour and family life – when they create their own houses and families, centred around the balls. Butler argues that this resignification emphasizes the performativity of gender and sexuality in general. However, resignification is not uncomplicated. Butler acknowledges that in some cases, history and prior citation are overwhelmingly present in the current connotation, which makes resignification difficult, if not impossible. In her book *Excitable Speech*, she writes: ‘There is no purifying language of its traumatic residue, and no way to work through trauma except through the arduous effort it takes to direct the course of its repetition’ (38). Thus, although it may be difficult in some cases, it should be possible, according to Butler, to create new meanings, or extended meanings from speech acts such as hate speech. She claims that in any case, to rob the word of its original signification is a more efficient way of quieting down the effect it bears than to lay restrictions upon it.

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins describes how African American women in black communities have created their own family structures, or in Butler’s terms, re-cited the typical nuclear-family structure. One such African American family structure is that the rearing of children is often a cooperation between their biological mother (or *bloodmother*), and *othermothers*, who can be relatives, close friends or neighbours. Collins argues that because of the extended family structure in many African American communities, it is not seen as abnormal or wrong for women to not have children of their own, as many are involved with childcare in other ways, as othermothers. It also makes it possible for mothers to have a career without feeling guilt for leaving her children with strangers, and facilitates the situation for single mothers and broken families. This structure can be seen as an Afrocentric re-citation of the nuclear-family structure, as they are results of a heritage from the African culture paired with the family structure that was imposed upon black people during slavery.

Collins stresses how important it is to study and understand black women’s situations from an Afrocentric perspective, as the Western interpretation of black women, based on an elite

white male perspective, gives a false and often damaging portrayal of black communities. From an outsider's perspective, the extended family structure may seem inadequate or as a result of failure, and because these structures do not fit the hegemonic idea of the family, white supremacists have created several myths about black women. I will return to Collins' ideas of an Afrocentric analysis and the myths about black women in the next section of this chapter.

1.5 The problem with race

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler responds to the criticism she received after her first books *Subjects of Desire* and *Gender Trouble* when she includes the issue of race. Butler argues that not only sex, gender and sexuality but also race are controlled by regulatory norms: '[t]he symbolic – that register of regulatory ideality – is also and always a racial industry, indeed, the reiterated practice of *racializing* interpellations' (*Bodies That Matter*, 18). She insists that in the identificatory process, sex, race and sexuality are intertwined and warns against viewing them as separate identities:

To prescribe an exclusive identification for a multiply constituted subject, as every subject is, is to enforce a reduction and a paralysis, and some feminist positions, including my own, have problematically prioritized gender as the identificatory site of political mobilization at the expense of race or sexuality or class or geopolitical positioning/displacement. (*Bodies That Matter*, 116)

'Identity' is thus a very complex matter, for not only is it formed by the repeated acts that are bred by regulatory norms, but one is hailed into this discourse as a subject of multiple assets; and these assets influence each other. I promised earlier that I would connect J. Butler's ideas with those of black feminists. Collins writes in *Black Feminist Thought* that analyzing the interaction of race, gender, sexuality and class is more efficient in empowering black women because such a study will eliminate the oppressive system of dichotomy which will always present the black woman as the ultimate 'Other'.

Viewing relations of domination for Black women for any given sociohistorical context as being structured via a system of interlocking race, class, and gender oppression expands the focus of analysis from merely describing the similarities and differences distinguishing these systems of oppression and focuses greater attention on how they interconnect. Assuming that each system needs

the others in order to function creates a distinct theoretical stance that stimulates the rethinking of basic social science concepts. (Collins, 222)

Collins describes one influential, socially constructed *tool* which has its root in the binary system's idea of the black woman as a sexual, animalistic creature in contrast to the pure, white Madonna. This tool consists of the powerful negative images of 'the mammy', 'the matriarch', 'the welfare mother' and 'the Jezebel', and has been and is still used to oppress black women and to control their sexuality.

Unfortunately, the images seem to have set roots also in black women's ideas of themselves, as becomes evident when Dana describes her first impression of Sarah: 'She was the kind of woman who might have been called "mammy" in some other household. She was the kind of woman who would be held in contempt during the militant nineteen sixties. The house-nigger, the handkerchief-head, the female Uncle Tom' (*Kindred*, 145). I will come back to how Dana during her journeys to Maryland meets women whose performativity fits the descriptions in the four categories mentioned above, but who at the same time change Dana's view as they all turn out to be very complex and courageous women who never had a chance to choose their destinies.

Collins argues, as Judith Butler also does, that focusing on a multifaceted oppressive system of race, gender, sexuality and class, will open up for more solutions to social structure – or what Butler would call a *recitation* of the traditional, western institutions. For African American women Collins insists on an Afrocentric worldview which would be a more constructive way of understanding black communities and create positive self-definitions:

Afrocentric feminist notions of family reflect this reconceptualization process. Black women's experiences as bloodmothers, othermothers, and community othermothers reveal that the mythical norm of a heterosexual, married couple, nuclear family with a nonworking spouse and a husband earning a 'family wage' is far from being neutral, universal, and preferred but instead is deeply embedded in specific race and class formations. (Collins, 222-3)

From an Afrocentric perspective, black women can find new images to identify with, and the discrimination and prejudices they meet will be easier to shun and fight. In interviews Octavia Butler has explained how she as a young girl often joined her mother at work and observed how she was abused and treated as an invisible non-person. Octavia Butler noticed that this treatment changed her mother's behaviour and self-definition:

I used to see her going in back doors, being talked about while she was standing right there and basically being treated like a non-person, something beneath notice...And I could see her later as I grew up. I could see her absorbing more of what she was hearing from the whites than I think even she would have wanted to absorb. (Quoted in Crossley, 'Reader's Guide' to *Kindred*, 270)

Thus Octavia Butler experienced early what Judith Butler later presented in her theory as performativity. Octavia Butler reveals that she for a long time blamed her mother rather than her white employers for this role of a demeaning woman that they had assigned for her. Later, Butler could see that her own generation, although they had some knowledge about black history, were still too detached from the real life experiences of their ancestors to understand truly what they had gone through in order to ensure their own and their children's survival. One of the reasons why she wrote *Kindred* is that she wanted to show how people in different ways are coerced into a behavior pattern, and that this in turn changes the way others see and treat them and more importantly how people see themselves. To cut off the past and start fresh is not a way to break free from this vicious circle. Instead, it is crucial to get to know one's history, and learn about the power structures that lie behind one's performativity. Only this way may a person use the system to his/her own advantage, and be able to change the conditions for the future generations.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Judith Butler attempts to include *race* in her analyses of *Paris is Burning* and *Passing*. Nevertheless, in both of Butler's analyses the dominant aspect of performativity seems to be *sexuality*. I suggest that one reason for this could be that as a white, homosexual woman, the racializing norms – contrary to what Butler says – comes second to gender, sex and sexuality, because race is a *less visible* part of her identity than her sexuality is. However, had she also been black, she would have had more knowledge about how race is influenced by and is influencing the other vectors of power, but then *race* would perhaps have become the dominant aspect of her identity. In fact, in the 'Introduction' of *Bodies That Matter*, there is a warning against assuming that one is able to understand fully the complexity of the powers behind the identificatory process:

[A]ny analysis which pretends to be able to encompass every vector of power runs the risk of a certain epistemological imperialism which consists in the presupposition that any given writer might fully stand for and explain the complexities of contemporary power. (*Bodies That Matter*, 18-19)

Nevertheless, I will apply Judith Butler's theory in my analysis of Octavia Butler's novel, and I intend to make sure that racial performativity is properly included in the analysis. My

main argument is that Octavia Butler shows how important it is to understand one's history. But it is not sufficient to rely on history as it is narrated from an outsider's point of view. For instance, only black women can experience black women's history and understand what it is like to be a black woman. Fortunately, fiction opens a gate that allows anyone access to participate in the character's experiences. Dana, the protagonist in *Kindred* is a black woman, and she tells her story in first person narrative. Through her narration, the reader may to a certain extent become one with Dana, and possibly feel the racializing interpellations Dana feels, and detect how the power mechanisms around her influence her behaviour and way of thinking, in other words, her performativity.

2. Before

In this chapter I discuss Dana's self-definition and performativity before her experiences in Maryland, and I focus my discussion on her repudiation of racial, sexual and gender interpellations. Judith Butler explains how gender, sexuality and race are performativity and nothing else, and that this performativity is controlled by different power structures, or regulatory norms that have become unuttered 'rules'. These rules create beliefs about what is 'normal', and prejudices about what to expect from the different groups of people in society. Dana's rejection of racial, gender and sexual interpellations may be due to the fact that she is unable to identify with the images or norms that are presented to her in the society. Instead of accepting the hailing, she has adopted the modern idea that one should disregard the old structures and institutions that control race, gender and sexuality and start fresh. The result of her detachment is however that she in a way has lost important parts of her own history and the connection with her family and the community in whole, and she has ended up with a feeling of being 'lonely and out of place' (*Kindred*, 52). Another result of her detachment is that her marriage to Kevin is in great risk of destruction, especially because they both seem to ignore the history that has formed the power mechanisms that potentially will break them up.

If Judith Butler is right in her ideas that one's identity springs from performativity, and performativity is based on repeated acts, it is possible to argue that Dana is isolated and displaced because of her acts. Therefore, I will show how this solitary state of mind is reflected in Dana's work, her gender performativity and detachment from family and roots. I believe that Octavia Butler's project with *Kindred* has been to demonstrate the importance of knowing one's history in order to be able form an identity one can be proud of. Only through the formation of positive images and identities can black people's situation improve, but it is crucial to understand that these images cannot be produced isolated from history and discourse. Dana's detachment from her racial identity is demonstrated by the contempt she feels about her ancestors and a lack of awareness of the history that precedes her, and for this reason it is necessary to send her back to her roots in the antebellum South.

2.1 Independence and Isolation

Kindred is divided into six sections which represent the six trips the protagonist Dana/Edana Franklin makes from California in 1976 to antebellum Maryland. The six sections have names that reflect the trouble her forefather Rufus is in, and thus the reason why Dana is called: 'the River', 'the Fire', 'the Fall', 'the Fight', 'the Storm' and 'the Rope'. The titles become increasingly dramatic as the story goes on, suggesting that the time Dana spends in Maryland is progressively more distressful and dangerous. There is also a 'Prologue' which foreshadows the dramatic events with the opening line, 'I lost an arm on my last trip home' (*Kindred*, 9). In an 'Epilogue', Dana goes back to present day Maryland in an attempt to find out what happened to everyone after her final escape. All the sections open with a comment about Dana in present time, or the close past, and some sections include flashbacks to the time Dana and Kevin met and married. From these fragments, the reader has to piece together an impression of Dana's personality before her bizarre journey began.

As not only Dana, but also the narration moves back and forth in time and place, Dana's performativity in the 1970's forms a rather vague character. At first, she does not seem to have a very strong personality – which is reflected in her husband Kevin's reaction to her when he compares her to the living dead on their first meeting: 'The first thing Kevin ever said to me was, "Why do you go around looking like a zombie all the time?"' (*Kindred*, 53). Dana even says herself that before she met Kevin, she was 'lonely and out of place' (*Kindred*, 52). Before Dana meets Kevin, her life revolves around work, sleep and writing. She has an anonymous job doing tedious work through a labour agency, or the 'slave market' as she calls it (*Kindred*, 52). There she is just a part of a grey crowd of easily replaceable 'non-people': 'It was nearly always mindless work, and as far as most employers were concerned, it was done by mindless people. Nonpeople rented for a few hours, a few days, a few weeks' (*Kindred*, 53). Dana is not a 'mindless' person – she is in fact very intelligent – but like everyone else who is working for the agency, she is dependent on the jobs they offer in order to put food on the table. Furthermore, she seems to act out the stereotypical non-person when she is out on a job. She describes how she used to take drugs to stay awake, and in a sort of sleepwalking state, she works without the need for thinking. The repetitive nature of the mindless work, the fact that Dana depends on it in order to survive, and the prejudice and degrading treatment she receives from other people because she does such work are typical power mechanisms that shape her performativity. Dana's

self-respect dwindles further when she is put in charge of checking that the other workers are doing their job right, simply because she can count and shows up every morning (*Kindred*, 53).

Octavia Butler has however given her main character a different, more intellectual side. Every night Dana writes her novel, and she describes herself as ‘fully awake, fully alive’ when she is writing (*Kindred*, 53). This night-time activity is somewhat secretive, as if she wants to hide this intellectual part of herself from the world. This double life Dana lives may be seen as a parallel to the life of the slaves she later meets in Maryland. From an outsider’s point of view, these men and women are a grey mass. The slaves appear apathetic, unintelligent and easy to control, but, as Dana will discover, underneath lurks highly complex personalities and very bright minds. The way they hide this complex side of themselves from outsiders will prove to be an important part of the fight for survival, while they anticipate better times for their children.

Similarly, Dana’s ticket out of the modern day slave market is her secret novel, but until it is published, she must play the part that is expected of her. Nevertheless, although she does not feel that the person she is when she is at work is a genuine representation of her, her performance at work has an effect on her life. This is demonstrated in the way she behaves around Kevin when they first meet. Her attitude reveals that she expects him to look down on her because of the work she does and laugh at her for the dreams she has of becoming an author. When Kevin comes up to her at work and asks if she is a writer, she denies it at first, possibly afraid that he would make fun of her: ‘I’m a joke as far as Buz is concerned. He thinks people are strange if they even read books. Besides, [...] what would a writer be doing working out of a slave market?’ (*Kindred*, 53). Because of the double life she lives, Dana has obviously become hostile towards others and afraid to be frank about what her dreams are, and the result is that she isolates herself from others. This way, performance has become performativity.

It is however not only her anonymous daytime work that gives the impression that Dana has a vague personality. Her identity is further blurred by her repudiation of stereotypical feminine traits. Dana seems eager to appear almost asexual, as she does not follow the typical rules of gender performativity, at least not from a ‘traditional’ point of view. First of all, she breaks the ‘rules’ with her physical appearance because she keeps her hair short and

hardly ever wears dresses. When she arrives in Maryland, she is often mistaken for a man because of the way she looks. Furthermore, she does not show much interest in children and makes it clear that she does not want nurturing or submissive – typically feminine – occupations. Instead, her dream is to be an author, a field dominated by white men.

Other traditionally ‘unfeminine’ traits are her independency and determination. It is very important for Dana to be independent, and she does not like it when Kevin buys her lunch at work. She wants to turn it down, even if she is starving. Although she detests working for the agency, she will not let Kevin help her out financially so that she can quit the job and finish her novel instead. It turns out that Dana is skeptical about accepting favours from others because she is afraid that it will give them control over her:

The independency the agency gave me was shaky, but it was real. It would hold me together until my novel was finished and I was ready to look for something more demanding. When that time came, I could walk away from the agency not owing anybody. My memory of my aunt and uncle told me that even people who loved me could demand more of me than I could give – and expect their demands to be met simply because I owed them. I knew Kevin wasn’t that way. The situation was completely different. But I kept my job. (*Kindred*, 108-9)

Dana’s need for independence is thus closely linked to her refusal of letting other people dictate how she should live her life. She tells Kevin about her uncle and aunt who raised her and in return expected her to listen to their career advice. They wanted her to pick a vocation that would be ‘sensible’, and their suggestions had been occupations that are considered to be female dominated. Instead of listening to their advice, she broke with them, decided to make it on her own, and thus laid the foundation for her solitary path.

Dana’s gender performativity in the 1970’s suggests that she has implemented modern ideas of equality between the sexes. Furthermore, her isolation and independence reflect the atmosphere in the American society during the Seventies. The post-war years in the United States, and in particular the Sixties and Seventies, was a time of prosperity, industrialization and progress, and of the formation of the nation as one of supremacy in the Western world. An important part of the discourse was to think forward and think new and repudiate old structures. It was a time for feminism and Civil Rights movements, but also a time for individualism and a search for ‘self’. Dana is a product of her time. She represents the independent, strong, modern woman through and through. It is tempting to suggest that Octavia Butler created her main character this way to further increase the contrast between

the life Dana is used to in California and the life she is forced to live in Maryland. Her modern ideas of individualism and future-thinking are completely futile to Dana in the antebellum South. However, as will be discussed in chapter four, Dana brings home knowledge from her experiences in Maryland, which will be valuable in her identity formation in her own time. This may be interpreted as a message from the author to her contemporaries that disregarding the past does not make a person or nation stronger or more capable of survival in difficult times. On the contrary, in the past lies the answer to handling the future.

2.2 The Inhibited Sexuality

After Dana meets Kevin, an empty space that she did not know was there is filled. With him she suddenly feels that she is *someone*, because she has found a person who is so much like her. Kevin has met similar difficulties in his life, but he has never let go of the idea of one day being a full time writer. Dana has found a 'kindred spirit' (*Kindred*, 57). Nevertheless, their interracial relationship is not uncomplicated. I believe that Dana's performativity as Kevin's girlfriend, fiancé and wife expresses an unconscious fear in Dana, the fear of losing him because the violent and oppressive history of the relationship between white men and black women could easily influence their marriage and damage the happiness and mutual respect. She is also afraid of being associated with the image of *Jezebel*, the negative image that has been applied to shape people's ideas of black women since the time of slavery. In the following, I discuss how this fear has shaped Dana's performativity. Her unconscious way of dealing with this anxiety is by ignoring or repudiating the traits that could potentially confirm this negative image, and the result of this denial is typically shown in her gender, sexuality and racial performativity.

If we look at Dana's sexual performativity, we get the impression that she is sexually inhibited. Although she narrates in detail about other incidents, for example the first time she witnesses a whipping, her first sexually intimate moment with Kevin is reduced to a sentence, as if she wants to suppress that she has a sensual side to her personality: 'It was a good evening. I brought him home with me when it was over, and the night was even better' (*Kindred*, 57). This brevity about her sexuality can be explained by Dana's resistance

towards being hailed as a *Jezebel*. In *Black Feminist Thought* Collins quotes Lorraine Hansberry's *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*:

In the streets out there, any little white boy from Long Island or Westchester sees me and leans out of his car and yells – ‘Hey there, *hot chocolate*! Say, there Jezebel! Hey you – “Hundred Dollar Misunderstanding”! YOU! Bet you know where there’s a good time tonight...’. (Lorraine Hansberry, 1969 (98), quoted in Collins, 173)

In *Kindred*, there is a section with similar comments to those Hansberry’s character has to deal with. An annoying co-worker, Buz, whispers offensive remarks at Dana when she talks to Kevin at the work place:

‘Hey!’ whispered another voice behind me. Buz. [...] ‘Hey, you two gonna get together and write some books?’ he asked, leering. ‘Get out of here,’ I said breathing as shallowly as possible. ‘You gonna write some poor-nography together!’ (*Kindred*, 54)

Buz sidled by. ‘Hey,’ he said, low-voiced. ‘Porn!’ (*Kindred*, 55)

Buz, coming back from the coffee machine muttered, ‘Chocolate and vanilla porn!’ (*Kindred*, 56)

Buz’s abusive remarks demonstrate a sexual prejudice black women often are met with: that because of their allegedly unusually strong sexual desire, they are good for only two things: pornography and prostitution. Collins explains that the image of Jezebel, the sexually aggressive, black prostitute, has both justified the sexual violence against African American women and been upheld by the continued abuse since the time of slavery, and it is unfortunately still an image black women struggle to get rid of today: ‘Like the characters in Hansberry’s fiction,’ Collin writes, ‘all Black women are affected by the widespread controlling image that African-American women are sexually promiscuous, potential prostitutes’ (Collins, 174).

The consequence is that black women have had to keep a lid on their sexuality in order to destroy the image of the seducing Jezebel. In the ‘Introduction’ to her edition of Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* and *Passing*, Deborah E. McDowell mentions how black female authors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did their best to create female characters who showed chastity, not promiscuity: ‘Fighting to overcome their heritage of rape and concubinage, and following the movement by black club women of the era, they imitated the “purity,” the sexual morality of the Victorian bourgeoisie’ (McDowell, xiii). This may be Dana’s intention too, when she seeks to hide her sexuality from the world, and from the

reader. The intention behind the smothering of the image of the promiscuous black woman by denying black women's sexuality altogether can easily be connected to Judith Butler's ideas of performativity. The regulatory powers were in this case initiated by the myth that all black women have an abnormal sexual drive, which justified decades, if not centuries, of the repeated acts of sexual abuse and exploitation of them. At some stage, many black women must have started to identify themselves with this image; they had been hailed into the role of Jezebel. In order to put an end to this terrible circle, 'elite' black women decided to create a new image of the chaste, pure, virgin black heroine, which hopefully could become the new model to identify with. However, as Judith Butler argues, a problem does not go away just by denying that it exists. Even though the image of Jezebel is false and harmful, to refuse that black women have sexual drives altogether will not help their situation. And this dichotomy, as we shall see, becomes an important issue also in *Kindred*.

2.3 Interracial Relationships

Dana may also want to tone down her sexuality due to the fact that she is in a relationship with a white man. In many ways, interracial relationships have been as controversial as homosexual relationships are in many countries today. In her book, Collins has placed the section about black women's relationship to white men so close to the section on black lesbian relationships that it is tempting to compare the two in this analysis regarding the effect of regulatory powers on gender, race and sexual performativity. I mentioned in chapter one that Judith Butler's perspective on performativity focuses to a great extent on sexuality, and especially so-called 'deviant' sexuality, and how this identity formation is influenced by going against what is seen as 'normal'. She argues that it is important to notice that the regulatory norms about sexual practices typically call for heterosexuality, but also for racial purity:

[I]t seems crucial to rethink the scenes of reproduction, and, hence, of sexing practices not only as ones through which a heterosexual imperative is inculcated, but as ones through which boundaries of racial distinction are secure as well as contested. Especially at those junctures in which a compulsory heterosexuality works in the service of maintaining hegemonic forms of racial purity, the 'threat' of homosexuality takes on a distinctive complexity. (*Bodies That Matter*, 18)

Hence, according to the regulatory norms, an interracial marriage is *unnatural* and *deviant* because the children born to this union can never be racially 'pure'. Although the controversy regarding interracial and homosexual relationships differs, the result can be similar, at least in Dana's case.

One may argue that because they stay together, Dana and Kevin go against the norms, which could imply that they are liberal and individual thinkers. However, their union comes at a cost: they are forced to isolate themselves partly from society, and completely from their closest relatives. I have already discussed the abusive remarks Dana has to put up with from her co-worker, and both she and Kevin experiences that their families do not accept their choice in partner. Dana describes how her uncle, who raised her as his own is disappointed and hurt because she chose to marry a man of a different race than him. Dana says: 'Now...it's as though I've rejected him. Or at least that's the way he feels. It bothered me, really. He was more hurt than mad. Honestly hurt. I had to get away from him' (*Kindred*, 111). Kevin's family is no better; his sister does not want to meet Dana at all and lets Kevin know that he is unwelcome if he marries her (*Kindred*, 110). Kevin and Dana's relatives react the way they do because they are a part of the ideology that has adopted the 'inevitable truth' that claims interracial marriage to be wrong. In order to avoid dealing with the disappointment and ostracism they both feel when they are faced with their families' prejudiced minds, Dana and Kevin decide to break with them, and elope in Las Vegas with no friends or family present. Kevin even suggests that they pretend they do not have any relatives (*Kindred*, 112).

The imperative of racial purity is not the only reason that interracial relationships are problematic. According to Collins, the violent and abusive history between white men and black women is still standing in the way of a full acceptance for a voluntary union between them. She writes:

Freedom for Black women has meant freedom from white men, not the freedom to choose white men as friends and lovers. Black women who have willingly chosen white male friends and lovers have been severely chastised in African-American communities for selling out the 'race,' or they are accused of being like prostitutes, demeaning themselves by willingly using white men for their own financial or social gain. (Collins, 191)

Hence, black women who go out with white men are accused of being prostitutes, no longer only by prejudiced whites, but also by the black community. Dana's performativity may

therefore be a result of her fear of being associated with the historical and highly influential images of black women, and especially black women in relationships with white men. Her relationship with Kevin is therefore an important force behind her performativity, as it is at the centre of her struggle to distance herself from these images. As she clearly tries to avoid being referred to as a white man's whore, Dana must insist on financial independency, put as little emphasis on her sexuality as possible and instead focus on the intellectual kinship she shares with Kevin.

On questions regarding why she provided Dana with a white husband, Octavia Butler has answered that she wanted to complicate her life (Crossley, 276). There are several links throughout the novel that compare Kevin and Rufus, and their similarities often confuse Dana, and her close connection with them complicates her relationship with the black community both in Maryland and in California. In *Claiming the Heritage*, Missy Dehn Kubitschek comments that *Kindred* is different from other African American women's literature because it attends to issues of interracial relationships (41). By including two white, male characters who both are closely connected to the black, female narrator, *Kindred* does not only consider black women's identity formation, but also that of white men.

2.4 Shame and Condemnation

Dana's detachment from her racial identity is not only influenced by the community's attitude against her interracial marriage. Dana also nurtures unstable bonds to her family because she is embarrassed by what they represent. Her closest relatives are her aunt and uncle, who are also her foster parents. Her relationship with them is however complicated. When they are discussing Kevin's proposal, it becomes clear that Dana does not want to be identified with her aunt and uncle. She comments on how outdated her aunt is because she thinks Dana's skin is too dark: "“She always said I was a little too ‘highly visible.’” [Kevin] stared at me. “You see? I told you they were old. She doesn't care much for white people, but she prefers light-skinned blacks. Figure that out”” (*Kindred*, 111). Her aunt and uncle's career advice also reveals their old fashioned ideas of what sort of occupation would suit a black woman, and their persistence pushes Dana away. Dana's refusal of working as a teacher, nurse or secretary may be due to the fact that she does not like the thought of being

in the service of others. Instead, she wants to have a voice of her own, be someone of importance, who can make a difference, someone to admire.

This view is reflected in her initial attitude towards the slave woman Sarah, who seemingly has accepted her role of ‘mammy’ and ‘aunt’ in the Weylin household:

‘Don’t want to hear no more,’ she repeated softly. ‘Things ain’t bad here. I can get along.’ She had done the safe thing – had accepted a life of slavery because she was afraid. She was the kind of woman who might have been called ‘mammy’ in some other household. She was the kind of woman who would be held in contempt during the militant nineteen sixties. The house-nigger, the handkerchief-head, the female Uncle Tom – the frightened powerless woman who had already lost all she could stand to lose, and who knew as little about the freedom of the North as she knew about the hereafter. I looked down on her myself for a while. Moral superiority. Here was someone even less courageous than I was. That comforted me somehow. (*Kindred*, 145)

To Dana, her foster parents and Sarah represent those who never seem to stand up for themselves, the ones who stay in their ‘place’ and because of this, do not contribute to the improvement of black people’s conditions, neither in the 1800’s nor the twentieth century. Before her first trip to the nineteenth century, Dana is not aware of the long history of black women’s activism, a tradition that started during slavery and continued throughout the 1900’s. Naturally she knows about the famous black men and women who run away, worked on the Underground Railroad, were the first to join abolitionist movements and later, to work for suffrage and civil rights. However, the majority of black women have worked towards freedom and against oppression in more subtle ways, through doing what was needed in order to survive and provide for their children, but also through constantly influencing their children to resist the performativity that are expected of black people. I will return to this issue in chapter three.

Dana’s interpretation of black women’s history demonstrates her condescending view of her female ancestors, or at least the type of ‘inactive’ African Americans that her aunt and uncle represent to her. This embarrassment that Dana is feeling is not unique to her, as Octavia Butler has stated in interviews (Crossley, 270). When she was a student, Butler noticed that many of her fellow black students demonstrated strong contempt against the men and women who had worked hard and endured so much abuse and injustice in order to ensure their children’s future. This is the reason why she created Dana, this modern, but somewhat ignorant young women, and made sure she is snatched out of her comfortable bubble to find

herself in situations where she is forced to make choices that run contrary to her principles, unable to resist the powers around her. As long as she keeps isolating herself from the black community, Dana will not be able to find positive images to relate to and identify with. By sending the main character back in time to a crucial point in history, Butler makes sure that not only her characters, but also the modern readers will learn a lesson about the complexity of oppression. This will in turn hopefully result in a new-found respect for the people who did what they could to survive and ensure future generations.

2.5 The Threat of Destruction

Although Dana and Kevin both do their best to keep history away from their relationship, some comments reveal that the threat of breaking their mutual respect and feeling of kinship lurks right beneath the surface. As long as they are in California, Dana is able to keep the balance they need. When Kevin suggests that she should get rid of some of her books so she could move into his apartment, Dana replies: 'Let's go to your place and I'll help you decide which of your books you don't read. I'll even help you throw them out' (*Kindred*, 108). Another fight starts when Dana refuses to do secretarial work for Kevin, even if her resistance towards typing his manuscripts seems to jeopardize their whole relationship:

He really had asked me to do some typing for him three times. I'd done it the first time, grudgingly, not telling him how much I hated typing, how I did all but the final drafts of my stories in longhand. [...] The second time he asked, though, I told him, and I refused. He was annoyed. The third time when I refused again, he was angry. He said if I couldn't do him a little favor when he asked, I could leave. So I went home. (*Kindred*, 109)

When Kevin proposes, he makes a little joke and says: 'I'd let you type all my manuscripts' (*Kindred*, 109). In the essay '*Kindred's* Outlook on Racial and Sexual Equality', Tabitha McIntosh-Byrd comments on Kevin's proposal. Her interpretation of his comment is that it demonstrates his discriminatory and patriarchal thinking, and that there is a power struggle between them that they both try to close their eyes to. The fights they have disclose how fragile their relationship really is. Although he is relatively modern and liberal, Kevin reveals that he is influenced by discourse when he assumes that Dana will submit to his will. Their vision of a marriage based upon equality and intellectual kinship goes against the powerful structures in the discourse around them, especially because their relationship is

interracial. Kevin's desire of using Dana as his secretary in many ways become real when they are in Maryland together.

When Kevin joins Dana on her third trip, he is asked if Dana belongs to him and his answer is: 'In a way, [...] she's my wife' (*Kindred*, 60). Again, he lets slip that he has some old fashioned patriarchal ideas of marriage. Later, Kevin is perverse enough to claim that Dana is a literate slave that he brings along to do the writing for him. He could have found another excuse for their existence there; instead he uses the one thing they seem to have been arguing about, and – although he may not be aware of it himself – he thus disregards the mutual respect their relationship was based on. Kevin's lie further suggests that using Dana as his secretary may still be a fantasy of his, and in Maryland of 1819 the loss of power that is imposed upon Dana forces her to pretend that she is. The study of their performativity thus reveals how easily their marriage can be damaged. I suggest that a reason for this vulnerability is that in their own time, instead of confronting the regulatory practices that may harm their union, Dana and Kevin seem to deny the very existence of such forces. Their marriage is therefore built upon a frail foundation. When they are in the antebellum South, the threat becomes more obvious, and Dana recognizes this risk.

Kevin's lies regarding their relationship demonstrate his insensitivity to the history of racial and sexual power relations and how easy it is for the discourse of this history to influence their performativity and contaminate their union, no matter how much they strive to ignore it. Dana however is starting to see the power in the regulatory practices around them, because she expresses concern about how Kevin will cope in the discourse of the antebellum South. She is concerned that he will change if he stays in Maryland for a long time: 'a place like this would endanger him in a way I didn't want to talk to him about. If he was stranded here for years, some part of this place will rub off on him' (*Kindred*, 77). However, she does not discuss her concern with Kevin, and consequently she continues to repress the fact that the new discourse might affect them.

Dana and Kevin's lack of concern for history is highly significant. First of all because it is the very reason they have to go through the experiences in Maryland in the first place, secondly because their naïve way of thinking repeatedly puts them in dangerous situations when they are in Maryland. They both need to experience history up close before they can rebuild their union on a stronger and more stable platform, and this is another reason why the author sends them to Maryland together.

2.6 How to Make Use of the Past to Improve the Future

Thus far I have put together the pieces that form Dana as a character before she is taken away from her comfortable, modern world to experience the realities of the antebellum South. The reader is left with the image of a woman who tries to opt out of the structures that she is supposed to conform to. She seems determined to be as *grey* as possible, as she is somewhat asexual, or at least sexually reserved, and racially neutral. In the essay 'The Master's Pieces: On Canon Formation and African-American Tradition' Henry Louis Gates Jr. calls for a higher alertness to history and social identity. He counters the scholars who disavow the creation of an African American canon because they claim that canon formation is corrupt and too influenced by politics. At the same time as academics considered canon formation to be politically incorrect and controversial, they also started to consider gender, race and sexuality to be mere political and social constructions, and therefore they should be discarded— at least in theory. Judith Butler writes:

I follow those recent theories which have made the argument that the 'race' is partially produced as an effect of the history of racism, that its boundaries and meanings are constructed over time not only in the service of racism, but also in the service of the contestation of racism. (*Bodies That Matter*, 18)

However, as Gates points out, it does not make it easier for him as a black man to get a taxi, if he tells the taxi driver that race is a mere construction: 'Please sir, it's only a metaphor!' (Gates, 107). Judith Butler also comments that 'to claim that race is produced, constructed or even that it has a fictive status is not to suggest that it is artificial or dispensable' (*Bodies That Matter*, 247, note 15). On the contrary, she argues that race 'becomes precisely a presiding and indispensable force within politically saturated discourses in which the term must continually be resignified *against* its racist usages' (*Bodies That Matter*, 248, note 15). Hence, after centuries and decades of oppression and discrimination, black people and other racial minorities should be able to take pride in their background and to formulate new self-definitions based on their racial heritage without being perceived as politically incorrect. Similarly, Gates seems to think that the academics' rejection of the canon and the concept of race came at a quite convenient time – if the aim is to keep excluding black people and other minorities from intellectual society. He argues that the structures that always have been used to discriminate against African Americans have suddenly lost their status as significant, now that they finally could be useful to the people who have been suppressed by these structures. The formation of an African American canon will for example facilitate the teaching of

black authors in literature studies: ‘Once our anthology is published, no one will ever again be able to use the unavailability of black texts as an excuse not to teach our literature’ (Gates, 101).

Gates warns against using the knowledge about the history of institutions, and gender, sexuality and race construction in a wrong way. He uses the process of canon formation as an example to demonstrate that in order to change conditions people should not turn their backs on the old institutions, but use them in their own ways. It is however vital to avoid repeating the wrongs of the past, and the only way to do this is to familiarize oneself with history. I mentioned in chapter one that Judith Butler calls for re-citation as a means for change, rather than repressing old structures by denial. This is similar to what Gates argues, as he suggests that people must become aware of the regulatory powers and institutions and use them to their own benefit, instead of fearing them or disregarding them altogether.

He advises minority groups to get to know the history, institutions, structures, and constructed identities that have been used in order to categorize them throughout history, and use this knowledge when they create their own self-identity:

Self-identification proves a condition for agency, for social change. And to benefit from such collective agency, we need to construct ourselves, just as the nation was constructed, just as the class was, just as *all* the furniture in the social universe was. It’s utopian to think that we now can disavow our social identities; there’s no other one to take its place. You can’t opt out of a Form of Life. We can’t become one of those bodiless vapor trails of sentience portrayed on that *Star Trek* episode, though often it seems like the universalists want us to be just that. You can’t opt out of history. History may be a nightmare, as Joyce suggested, but it’s time to stop pinching ourselves. (Gates, 106)

In this chapter I have pointed to aspects that suggest that this is also the point Octavia Butler aims at when she decided to send a modern woman, who has almost become one of these ‘bodiless vapor trails of sentience’, to a crucial point in her history. Dana tries to create a self-definition based on a *tabula rasa*, but as Gates stresses in his essay: that is not possible. One must take history and society into consideration.

2.7 Summing up:

In this chapter the discussion has revolved around Dana's performativity before the first time Rufus summons her to Maryland. I started out with piecing together an impression of Dana before she met Kevin, and discussed how her performativity is influenced by her work and marriage. My conclusion is that Dana's performativity forms a blurry and grey identity: she is not trying to unconsciously repeat normativity, but she is not actively trying to re-cite her identity either. Because of her lack of knowledge about the past, and detachment from the black community, she has nurtured a disapproving view of her black ancestors. This in turn deprives her of role models who could help her on the quest for a positive self-identity. Although she believes her modern perspectives make her strong and independent, my next chapter will show that her ignorance has in fact made her more vulnerable to the influences of the regulatory powers that she is about to encounter in antebellum Maryland.

3. During

In this chapter I argue how *Kindred* demonstrates that although we modern people believe that we are better equipped to resist the regulatory forces that lead to the inhumane treatment of one group of people by another, we are not. I have outlined the state Dana was in before her journeys started. She was a modern, intelligent and independent woman. However, her independence had come at the cost of isolating herself from her family and roots, and growing up in a modern time has made her look forward, thus ignoring instead of acknowledging the destinies and identities of the past. Dana, as many other young, intelligent people, believes that it is possible to create her own images to identify with, and that the representations of the past must be suppressed. This state of mind, she trusts, will make her stronger and more resilient to influence than the people that have preceded her, because she thinks she is more capable of making her own choices. However, as this chapter will show, Dana's performativity in Maryland reveals that she adjusts to slavery just as easily as everyone else in the antebellum South. I argue that this could be due to the fact that she had so persistently refused to identify with parts of her background that could have been helpful to her during her life as a slave, but on the other hand, there is nothing in 1976 that could have prepared her for the discourse she is about to be a part of in early nineteenth century Maryland.

There are four ways in which Dana is enslaved. First of all, she discovers early that Rufus Weylin is her ancestor, and that in order to survive, she must make sure that he stays alive long enough to father her great great-grandmother Hagar. Thus, every time he is in danger, regardless of her own feelings for him, she has to do what it takes to save him. Second, she also realizes that she cannot control at what time Rufus summons her and must constantly be prepared to be snatched out of 1976 and return to the 1800's. Therefore, during her stays in LA she is imprisoned in her house – locked up until she is needed – constantly carrying a bag with necessary survival products around, worrying about when she will be taken away next. Third, because she keeps coming back to Maryland, she must make sure that she has a safe place to come back to. The way to do this is first of all to befriend Rufus and hopefully sway him into becoming more humane towards black people than other men of his time. She also needs to justify her place on the farm by pretending to be one of the slaves. While she is doing this, her performativity gradually changes, and in some ways, she ends up as a

different woman. The fourth way Dana is enslaved is through her benevolence, which Rufus early starts to take advantage of when he discovers that he can control her by threatening to hurt others. For a while it seems as if she will sacrifice her own freedom in order to hinder the sale of Weylin's slaves. I will discuss this towards the end of the chapter.

3.1 Hailing in practice

I have argued that Dana, because of her detachment from her black family and union with Kevin, has acquired a neutral racial identity. In fact, the reader does not know whether Dana is black or white until Rufus refers to her as 'just some strange nigger' (*Kindred*, 24) in section two of the novel, after she has put out the fire he made. Suddenly Dana is hailed as 'nigger', with all the connotations that come with this term. However, Dana refuses to answer this hailing, and makes the boy change the way he refers to her: 'I'm a black woman, Rufe. If you have to call me something other than my name, that's it' (*Kindred*, 25). Dana does not answer the boy's hailing, but when she understands that she is in early nineteenth century Maryland, she is marked by her blackness in ways she has not been before. She realizes that the colour of her skin is potentially life threatening because if a white man discovers her, she will be mistaken for a runaway slave. Her sparse knowledge of the conditions for black people in the time has an immediate effect on her performance, though not yet on her performativity. All of a sudden, she starts to behave like a villain or a hunted animal, as she tries to hide from white men:

I was glad to avoid the road, though. The possibility of meeting a white adult here frightened me, more than the possibility of street violence ever had at home. [...] Then I heard dogs barking – not too far away by their sound – and in sudden fear, I plunged through a tangle of new young growth and into the trees. I wondered about thorns, poison ivy, snakes... I wondered, but I didn't stop. A pack of half-wild dogs seemed worse. Or perhaps a pack of tame hunting dogs used to tracking runaway slaves. (*Kindred*, 33)

Her answer to the hailing makes her behave differently, but as performativity is a result of repetition of acts, she will only adapt to racialized norms if they continue to influence her over time. The description of Dana's first expedition in the antebellum South resembles the words of Frantz Fanon from *Black Skin, White Masks*: 'I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am

being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. [...] I slip into corners, I remain silent, I strive for anonymity, for invisibility' (Fanon, 116). Both Dana and Fanon describe their movements after they are reminded of their blackness by the abusive words of a white child. They answer to the interpellation, they may not agree with it, but in order to do what is necessary for survival, they act out the white hegemony's image of the stereotypical black person. In Dana's case, this implies the role of the runaway slave, whereas Fanon (for a while) finds his place as the inferior black man: 'I was expected to behave like a black man – or at least a nigger. I shouted a greeting to the world and the world slashed away my joy. I was told to stay within bounds, to go back where I belonged' (Fanon, 114-5). Fanon describes how his acts eventually became a part of his identity, because as he says, he strives for invisibility whenever he walks around in public. Hence, the acts have become performativity, and finally, not only others, but he too sees the negative image of a 'nigger' when he is looking at an image of himself. Similarly, to Dana's surprise, her increasingly longer stays in Maryland will ultimately change her initial performance into performativity.

The first two times Dana is called to Maryland she is alone and stays there only a short time, but long enough to realize what is going on. Upon the third arrival in Maryland, Kevin comes with her. After Rufus is safe, they discuss if they should leave the farm. Kevin enthusiastically suggests that they could go West and experience 'the building of the country' (*Kindred*, 97). Dana on the other hand has come to terms with the probability that she will come back more times. She plans to work on Rufus, hoping that she would be able to influence him to be friendlier towards black people than his father was:

As I hurried up the steps and into the house, I thought of Rufus and his father, of Rufus becoming his father. It would happen one day in at least one way. Someday Rufus would own the plantation. Someday, he would be the slaveholder, responsible in his own right for what happened to the people who lived in those half-hidden cabins. [...] But I would help him as best I could. And I would try to keep friendship with him, maybe plant a few ideas in his mind that would help both me and the people who would be his slaves in the years to come. I might even be making things easier for Alice.
(*Kindred*, 68)

Kevin is not too optimistic about her 'project'. He points out that the environment will have a stronger influence on him, and that although Rufus, when he is a boy, seems to be 'on equal terms' with the other slave children, he will have to 'find his place' when he grows up (*Kindred*, 83).

Also, there is still the problem with the fact that Hagar's mother is the black girl Alice – a problem since interracial relationships were illegal at the time, except in cases when black women were used as white men's concubines. Thus, at some point, Rufus must make Alice pregnant, and it is unlikely that it will happen under romantic circumstances. As Kevin says, Dana is 'gambling against history' (*Kindred*, 83) if she thinks she can change her forefather's future attitude towards black women. And as the story moves on, it becomes evident that Kevin is right, that the regulatory practices in the time are stronger than the influence Dana believes she has. This becomes evident when Rufus grows older and his performativity clearly reflects the ideology he grows up in, as his behaviour and attitude towards black people resembles that of other white men of his time. Before I return to this issue, I will discuss how the novel depicts the power mechanisms that control the performativity of both black and white men and women in the institution of slavery.

3.2 The First Stage: Acting

As I mentioned, it is crucial for Dana to establish a place she may return to, because it would be safer for her to live on the Weylin farm than to try to make it on her own. To her, that involves making friends with the other slaves on the plantation. She decides to blend in by working as hard as she can, since no-one likes a slave who does not work. Kevin argues with her for a while, but realizes that she is right:

'Wait a minute, you don't have to work for [Weylin]. You're not supposed to belong to him.' 'No, but I'm here. And I'm supposed to be a slave. What's a slave for, but to work? Believe me, he'll find something for me to do – or he would if I didn't plan to find my own work before he gets around to me.' He frowned. 'You want to work?' 'I want to... I have to make a place for myself here. That means work. I think everyone here, black and white, will resent me if I don't work. And I need friends. I need all the friends I can make here, Kevin. You might not be with me when I come here again. If I come here again.' (*Kindred*, 79)

Although she tries to act like she is just another slave, it is not easy for Dana to blend in. At first, Dana's manners confuse the people around her, both black and white, especially because of the way she speaks, which sounds like a white man's speech:

'Why you try to talk like white folks?' Nigel asked me. 'I don't,' I said, surprised. 'I mean, this is really the way I talk.' 'More like white folks than some white folks.' [...] 'You'll get into trouble,' he

said. 'Marse Tom already don't like you. You talk too educated and you come from a free state.'

'Why should either of those things matter to him? I don't belong to him.' The boy smiled. 'He don't want no niggers 'round here talking better than him, putting freedom ideas in our heads.' (*Kindred*, 74)

Rufus notices straight away that she is not a slave, just by the way she performs her blackness around him: 'You're not a slave, are you?' 'No.' 'I didn't think so. You don't talk right or dress right or act right. You don't even seem like a runaway.' 'I'm not.' 'And you don't call me "Master" either' (*Kindred*, 29). Much later, in fact years later in Maryland time, Dana has a similar discussion with her great great-grandmother Alice, but this time Alice, who has grown up as a free woman, asks Dana what it is like to be a slave, because in her eyes, Dana is a slave (*Kindred*, 156). This conversation reveals that Dana's performativity has changed from this first meeting with Rufus. At this point, Dana behaves more like a slave than a free woman, and Alice notices this. In the following, I will show how the environment changes the way Dana acts.

Dana senses early that she does not fit in, and that everyone she meets is hostile towards her: 'There was something about me that these people didn't like – except for Rufus. It wasn't just racial. They were used to black people' (*Kindred*, 70). It turns out that Rufus's father is annoyed because Dana confuses him. He does not know how to relate to her, because to him, her manners do not fit her appearance. She does not speak, dress or behave in a subdued manner like other black people, and because she does not to hide her intelligence, she stands out. Rufus later tells Dana how Tom Weylin tried to *explain* her: 'Daddy always thought you were dangerous because you knew too many white ways, but you were black. Too black, he said. The kind of black who watches and thinks and makes trouble' (*Kindred*, 255). It is obvious that Weylin needed to put her into a category. His idea of black people was that they are unintelligent, but as he meets one that obviously *is* intelligent, he had to make a new category: the cunning black person, intelligent, but sly.

Through comments like these, Dana is constantly reminded of the gap between blacks and whites. She also becomes more aware of her own blackness, and of how she is not fitting in with the schema that the people around her have made for her *kind*. It is crucial that she fits in, so after a while, Dana becomes very conscious about the way she is acting: 'As the days passed, I got into the habit of being careful. I played the slave, minded my manners probably more than I had to because I wasn't sure what I could get away with' (*Kindred*, 91). The

novel thus shows how people, because of the fear of being different, change their performativity in order to be more 'normal'. However, as I will discuss later, because Dana is born and brought up in a different time and environment, she does not know all the rules that one should follow. Therefore, the problem with the way Dana performs her blackness does not go away.

After a short time, Dana and Kevin become 'a part of the household, familiar, accepted, accepting' (*Kindred*, 97), and it frightens her that they get used to the life there so easily. For a while, Dana considers herself to be an observer, and believes that their lack of emotions toward everything that is going on is due to the fact that Kevin and Dana's lives in 1819 are not real, what they do is *acting*, but it is not *them*, it is not *performativity*, at least not in the beginning:

And I began to realize why Kevin and I had fitted so easily into this time. We weren't really in. We were observers watching a show. We were watching history happen around us. And we were actors. While we waited to go home, we humored the people around us by pretending to be like them. But we were poor actors. We never really got into our roles. We never forgot that we were acting. (*Kindred*, 98)

3.3 Dangerous Presumptions

Although Dana in many ways repudiates her black heritage, her trips to Maryland reveal that she has some assumptions regarding black history. She demonstrates at least some awareness of what life as a slave was like, what rules to follow, and how to blend in as best she can. She has obviously acquired a great deal of information about slavery from movies and slave narratives. As I mentioned in the introduction, slave narratives in many ways created ideas of a unified slave community. In the slave narratives, feelings and attitudes are unambiguous: slaves hate whites and vice versa. It turns out that much of her knowledge is faulty – sometimes with serious consequences – and thus she has to modify her preconceived ideas of the time.

One thing Dana discovers is the fallacy of the myth that all black people would help each other and be united against the whites. The first time she is endangered by her naïve belief in solidarity is when Alice's mother obstructs Dana's way into the cabin when she is attacked by the patroller (*Kindred*, 41). Dana has to fight for her life and is luckily sent back to her

own time in the battle. The second time is when she tries to run away from the Weylin farm, and another slave woman turns her in. Dana's reaction is utter disbelief:

I was startled. I had never had a serious enemy – someone who would go out of her way to get me hurt or killed. To slaveholders and patrollers, I was just a nigger, worth so many dollars. What they did to me didn't have much to do with me personally. But here was a woman who hated me and who, out of sheer malice, had nearly killed me. (*Kindred*, 178-9)

Dana's discussion with the slave woman Sarah reveals that she expects all slaves to want to run away. I mentioned in the previous chapter that she at first is condescending in her view of Sarah, who stays at the plantation, apparently loyal to Weylin, although he had sold her children one by one. Dana does not understand at first that this woman can be so weak, or why she does not even consider running away. However, after Dana has seen more of the powerful manipulative forces Weylin uses to keep them all enslaved, she understands that her first impression of Sarah was wrong. Dana recognizes that Sarah stays on the plantation because she needs to ensure her daughter's survival:

Weylin, for instance, had known just how far to push Sarah. He had sold only three of her children – left her one to live for and protect. I didn't doubt now that he could have found a buyer for Carrie, afflicted as she was. But Carrie was a useful woman. Not only did she work hard and well herself, not only had she produced a healthy new slave, but she had kept first her mother, and now her husband in line with no effort at all on Weylin's part. (*Kindred*, 169)

Another mistaken impression which Dana has about slavery before she comes to the Weylin farm, is that the signs of slavery are more *visible*. Dana expects to see children eating scraps from a tray like pigs, slaves being constantly beaten by a cruel overseer and work to be harder. After the first couple of weeks she and Kevin spend there, they are relieved to see that real life slavery was not as inhumane as they expected it to be, at least not on a superficial level. It turns out that they are badly mistaken, and that the truth about slavery is worse than either of them could have imagined.

The worst mistake Dana and Kevin make is to believe that they are more able to survive, or to avoid being influenced by the time because they are modern, well-informed and intelligent beings who although they have isolated themselves from their roots, know enough about history to not let it happen again, at least not to them. The Franklin couple also believe that they can make a difference, that they will help improve the lives of the people they meet, but it turns out that they are wrong. After an initial attempt to 'let history happen' by

not getting too involved, in time they are both drawn in. Dana is equally, and in some cases even more powerless than everyone else against the manipulative forces in the discourse around her. Kevin and Dana's performativity changes because it is the only way they can survive in the discourse of antebellum Maryland.

3.4 'I never realized how easily people could be trained to accept slavery'

One day Dana and Kevin watch some children playing. They play slave auction and the girl who is for sale argues with the boy who plays the auctioneer about the price he suggested for her. Dana is shocked and disgusted: 'My God, why can't we go home? This place is diseased' (*Kindred*, 99). Kevin thinks she is overreacting. He says that the children are only imitating adult behaviour and that there is nothing more to it. But what Dana becomes conscious of when she sees those children play, is that her *acting* may turn her into a real slave one day, just like the children's play will become real. 'Even the games they play are preparing them for the future – and that future will come whether they understand it or not' (*Kindred*, 99). The 'disease' Dana refers to when she says 'This place is diseased', may be what Judith Butler describes as the regulatory powers, the *invisible force* that shapes performativity and with that, our identity. In the antebellum discourse, the oppression of black people is justified by an ideology in the white community that rates black people inferior to white people. This 'inevitable truth', paired with corporal punishment and fear, are power mechanisms designed to shape black children into slaves and white children into oppressors.

The most important aspect of performativity is that it is a *repetition of acts*, and the fact that one is unconscious of the factors that influence it. In this novel there are both some highly visible power mechanisms at work, as well as some that are less obvious. In her narration, Dana mentions several tactics that were employed to make the black people believe that it was a law of nature that they stay in place. The repetitive nature of the work the slaves do is one such approach. The work Dana describes is more than anything tedious and repetitive. Very little happens to break up the monotonous life of the slave, and there is no room for personal development. Through this daily work, the black people become the 'mules' and 'oxen' they are supposed to be.

Another method to make sure the slaves stayed in their place and did not get ‘freedom ideas’ was to make sure they could not read. And even then, Rufus demonstrates to Dana that ‘dangerous’ books such as the history book she brings along from 1976 must be destroyed. Dana compares this act with those of the Nazis: ‘I tore the book into several pieces and threw it onto the hot coals in his fireplace. The fire flared up and swallowed the dry paper, and I found my thoughts shifting to Nazi book burnings. Repressive societies always seemed to understand the danger of “wrong” ideas’ (*Kindred*, 141). The only access to the written word for the slaves is through random encounters with representatives from the church, but even the Bible is censored in order to fit the ideology of the time. Dana observes a reverend and his wife who arrive to visit Weylin. Slave children flock around them, and the minister recites verses from the Bible which confirm the slaves’ status in society: ‘The kids always mobbed the minister – and his wife too when he brought her along. The couple dispensed candy and “safe” Bible verses (“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters...”’). The kids got candy for repeating the verses’ (*Kindred*, 183).

Other, more visible power mechanisms involved in the continuation of slavery were based on *fear*. In order to create fear, there were several powerful instruments available to the oppressor. Dana says: ‘Like the Nazis, ante bellum whites had known quite a bit about torture – quite a bit more than I ever wanted to learn’ (*Kindred*, 117). The whip is the most powerful symbol of fear. Dana first experiences this powerful tool when she witnesses the brutal whipping of Alice’s father on her second trip. She later describes how a whipping was used both as a punishment and to frighten the other slaves, thus keeping them under control:

The whip was heavy and at least six feet long, and I wouldn’t have used it on any living thing. It drew blood and screams at every blow. I watched and listened and longed to be away. But Weylin was making an example of the man. He had ordered all of us to watch the beating – all the slaves. [...] The whipping served its purpose as far as I was concerned. It scared me, made me wonder how long it would be before I made a mistake that would give someone reason to whip me. (*Kindred*, 92)

However, it turns out that watching a whipping did not scared her enough. A faithful believer in the power of education, she starts to teach the slave children Nigel and Carrie to read and write, and when Weylin discovers her, she gets first hand experience with the whip, which is powerful enough to send her home, and to keep her from trying to teach any more children until she has permission from Rufus. Hence, the whip has changed her performativity, as the memory of the pain and the fear of having to go through another

beating prevent her from continuing the illegal activity. When Dana unconsciously decides that her health becomes more important to her than educating slave children, a step towards becoming a slave has been made.

Being whipped for misbehaving was nothing compared to the punishment one received from running away. Most of the slaves would not even dare to consider running away, just because they had seen the condition the captured slaves are in: ““You need to look at some of the niggers they catch and bring back,” [Sarah] said. “You need to see them – starving, ‘bout naked, whipped, dragged, bit by dogs....You need to see them”” (*Kindred*, 145). After Dana is captured and punished for her attempt to run away, she realizes that there is no way she will be able to try again. And as she thinks that, she also has to take in the painful discovery that she is no longer only *acting* like a slave, she has begun to *think* like one: ‘*See how easily slaves are made?*’ (*Kindred*, 177). When Edwards the overseer threatens her with a whipping, she manages to do the task he commands her to do, even though her body has not yet recovered from the beating she got from her attempted escape:

‘Mr. Edwards, I’m not supposed to do the washing. [...]’ ‘You lyin’ nigger, you do what I tell you to do!’ Edwards loomed over me. ‘You think you been whipped? You don’t know what a whippin’ is yet!’ He carried his whip around with him. It was like part of his arm – long and black with its lead-weighted butt. He dropped the coil of it free. And I went out, God help me, and tried to do the wash. I couldn’t face another beating so soon. I just couldn’t. (*Kindred*, 182)

Thus, the painful memories and scarifications from the beatings keep her ‘in place’ and make her do things she did not think were possible. From a Foucauldian point of view Dana’s performativity –her conformity – may be explained by the fact that through the corporal punishment, her body has acquired knowledge about the power relationship between her and the masters on the plantation. The repeated beatings control her actions, because she has learned that some acts are ‘wrong’ and will lead to punishment. To avoid this, it is necessary to conform to what is normal behaviour for a slave, for example to never talk back to the masters, never refuse to do what she is told, and to stay in place. This way, the mere presence of the overseer or the whip will in most cases be enough in order to keep the slaves under control. This is an example of how individuals are a result of power, as Foucault says in a quote which I included in chapter one. Dana seems to gain a clear understanding of this concept, because in a conversation with the field-hand Sam towards the end of her stay, she

says that all the slaves ‘let’ the overseer control them. They ‘let him’ because they know that it will involve less pain and suffering than if they refuse.

3.5 Controlling Sexuality

Physical pain is not the only means of control that Dana experiences. An even more powerful tool was directed towards the women. Through sexual harassment and rape, white men showed their slaves, both men and women, how little control they had over their own bodies. In *Deviant Bodies*, Anne Fausto-Sterling describes the politics behind the construction of race and the myth about black women’s sexuality. A misconception that black women had never-ending, animalistic sexual desire was – as Fausto-Sterling portrays – fabricated by European scientists and eventually seen as an *inevitable truth*, a stereotypical trait connected to black women. This fallacy led to the idea that black women are more like animals than other people. Consequently, they do not have the same feelings towards their bodies and their children; they are wild and torrid and need to be tamed. This, of course, became the justification for enslaving and sexually abusing black women, and also for the use of them as *breeders*.

3.5.1 The Complexity of Concubinage

In the collection of articles, ‘On humiliation’, Evelin Gerda Lindner describes several intentions which a rapist may have. One goal is to use rape as a means of humiliation, not only of the victims, but perhaps more importantly of their husbands, boyfriends, fathers and brothers:

A would-be humiliator may look for ways to humiliate other people, let us say people of another ethnic group, and find that raping the enemy’s women is one possible tool among others for humiliating the enemy. [...] The main object is, typically, not to humiliate the raped woman herself, – she may be insignificant in the rapist’s eyes – but, much more important, to humiliate her ‘men’.
(Lindner, 140)

Hence, although interracial marriages and love affairs were illegal, not many people would interfere if a white man raped his female slaves. This ultimate act of humiliation was just another way of discouraging the black people and demonstrating how little power they had over their own bodies.

Although Rufus is doing what every other slave owner does when he rapes Alice, the relationship between them is slightly different. It becomes clear that a different kind of desire drives him to rape her. His intentions with her cannot be described merely as a means of humiliation, or breeding. In his own way, Rufus loves Alice, and wants her, but the only way he can have her is by forcing her, both because she does not want him, and because interracial love would be unacceptable. Dana says: 'I was beginning to realize that he loved the woman – to her misfortune. There was no shame in raping a black woman, but there could be shame in loving one' (*Kindred*, 124). His sexual preference is thus deviant for the time he lives in, and his way of normalizing it, is by using force. Rufus explains it himself:

'You want Kevin the way I want Alice. And you had more luck than I did because no matter what happens now, for a while he wanted you too. Maybe I can't ever have that – both wanting, both loving. But I'm not going to give up what I can have.' (*Kindred*, 124)

This kind of rape is what Lindner calls 'rape consciously intended as sex' during which the 'the rapist wants the victim to enjoy it' rather than to feel humiliated (Lindner, fig. 9,140). After explaining to Dana that he loves Alice, Rufus asks her to persuade Alice into letting him have her sexually, so that he does not have to use violence. His request puts Dana in a grim position. Under different circumstances, Dana would never contribute to rape, but because she knows that a sexual relationship between Rufus and Alice is the only way her great great-grandmother can be born, she is forced to help him with his misdeed and thus ensure her own existence. She talks Alice into going to him, and consequently feels less loyal to her people than ever before. She also learns an important lesson about how a person, faced with the threat of annihilation, must discard all principles and do what is necessary for one's survival.

Rufus' problematic feelings towards Alice complicate their relationship. Furthermore, towards the end Rufus tells Dana that Alice started to like him for a while, and that she even came to his bed once: 'Once, when you were gone, she came to my room. She came on her own' (*Kindred*, 251). Through the complicated feelings between Rufus and Alice, Octavia Butler breaks with the way the slave narratives typically portray a one-dimensional relationship between the victimized black woman in the hands of the brutal white rapist. Sadly, Alice is so confused and devastated when she understands that she likes Rufus that she decides to run away, despite the memories she has from her first attempted escape. Even Sarah hints that she once had romantic feelings for a white man (*Kindred*, 96). Butler may

have included these feelings to raise awareness regarding the complexity around black woman-white men relationships. She opens up for the thought that there in many cases could be a certain intimacy between the master and his concubine. Nevertheless, the institution of concubinage is definitely not glorified in *Kindred*, as Alice suffers for years before she starts to like Rufus. There is also the story about Tess, who is continuously raped by Tom Weylin and passed on to the overseer when he is fed up with her.

Lindner points out that no matter what the intention of rape is, the victim will feel humiliated and may ‘lose their former sense of self’ (Lindner, 142). The effect the sexual abuse inflicts on the women’s view of themselves and their sexuality is easy to see in Tess. Tess had hoped that Weylin would treat her better if she pleased him as his concubine, but instead she is sent to the fields when he has finished with her. “‘You do everything they tell you,” she wept, “and they still treat you like a old dog. Go here, open your legs; go there, bust your back. What they care! I ain’t s’pose to have no feelin’s!’” (*Kindred*, 182). Eventually, she is sold, possibly on Mrs Weylin’s request as a punishment for ‘seducing’ her husband. Once a strong, beautiful woman, Tess is reduced to a zombie-like figure.

[T]hree slaves were already being added to the line. Two men, [...] and one woman who moved as though she were sleepwalking. As I got closer, the woman began to look familiar to me. I stopped, almost not wanting to know who it was. A tall, strongly built, handsome woman. Tess. I’d seen her only two or three times this trip. She was still working in the fields, still serving the overseer at night. She’d had no children, and that may have been why she was being sold. Or maybe this was something Margaret Weylin had arranged. She might be that vindictive if she knew of her husband’s temporary interest in Tess. (*Kindred*, 222)

Alice also changes into a living dead after she gives up and lets Rufus get his way with her: ‘She went to him. She adjusted, became a quieter more subdued person. She didn’t kill, but seemed to die a little’ (*Kindred*, 169). The repeated rapes are acts that become performativity and transform Tess and Alice into soulless bodies in the hands of white men.

3.5.2 Dana’s sexuality

With *Kindred* Octavia Butler also demonstrates how the community typically blames the rape victim for the crime rather than the rapist, which is still happening in our ‘modern’ society. Dana has to experience the community’s treatment of a concubine first hand in order to change the ideas she has had about black women’s sexuality. When Kevin is in Maryland

with her, Dana pretends to be his concubine. Because their love and marriage is unacceptable in the 1800's, they play the game of master and concubine. After a while, Dana starts to feel ashamed. One reason could be that she knows they take advantage of the master-concubine structure which has made so many women suffer, and that Dana is rather enjoying it:

I knew then that if Margaret got me kicked out, it wouldn't be for doing a thing as normal as sleeping with my master. And somehow, that disturbed me. I felt almost as though I really was doing something shameful, happily playing whore for my supposed owner. I went away feeling uncomfortable, vaguely ashamed. (*Kindred*, 97)

Because she is 'happily playing whore' Dana is 'hailed' as a *Jezebel*. Not only do the abused women have to deal with being raped, they are even despised by white women and the other slaves *because* of it, as if they choose to be raped. Miss Margaret calls Dana a 'filthy, black whore' (*Kindred*, 93) when she discovers that she spends the nights in Kevin's room, and later, when Kevin is not there, several of the other slaves take it for granted that she is sleeping with Rufus. Sarah asks Dana what she will do after Alice arrives and takes over Dana's *position* with Rufus: 'She'll be in. You'll be out' (*Kindred*, 150). This shows how the powerful image of the promiscuous Jezebel has crept into people's minds and makes sure that the abused girls are the ones who look like sinners, not the white rapists. This in turn facilitates the continuation of the abuse, which consequently confirms the normality of such cruelty towards women and contributes to the creation of a sexual identity for black women.

When Weylin and Miss Margaret comment on Dana and Kevin's sexual relationship, Dana feels that what their union is ugly, and she starts to dislike it. In this way, her sexual performativity changes, because she has to repress her sexuality even further in order to escape the concubine-identity that she is given. I discussed earlier how Dana in her own time seems eager to repress her sexuality, and suggested that this is somewhat symptomatic of black women in general because they have had to struggle to get rid of the Jezebel-image. On the Weylin plantation, Dana experiences first hand how this image of Jezebel is connected to black women, not because they *are* whores, but because that is the way they were treated as and defined by white people, especially in order to justify sexual abuse. In the beginning, she fears this image, not only because it feels uncomfortable to be associated with it, but also because she in a way is confirming the myth.

However, on one of the trips home, when Dana finally manages to get both herself and Kevin back to their own time, she uses her sexuality explicitly to demonstrate her freedom. She insists on having sex with Kevin, although the scars and bruises on her back will hurt: 'He did hurt me, of course. I had known he would, but it didn't matter. We were safe. He was home' (*Kindred*, 190). This little episode may indicate that the knowledge that she has acquired about the history of control of black women's sexuality has changed her view of her own sexuality. Foucault says that truth is power, and Dana expands her notion of the truth in Maryland. She learns that black women's sexuality was restricted and controlled during slavery, but she will not continue to let herself be controlled in her own time. One could argue that she has re-cited her sexual performativity from restraining her sexual needs in order to be the opposite of a Jezebel and a concubine (as she does before her trips to the nineteenth century and to a greater extent while she is in Maryland), to use sexuality as a symbol of freedom.

When Kevin later tells her that he is afraid she will be sexually abused by Rufus, Dana explains that she could never let that happen. One reason is because she loves only Kevin, but as she says: 'But there's another reason, and when I'm back there it's the most important reason' (*Kindred*, 246). Dana would not let Rufus go as far as to rape her, but not because she 'belongs to' Kevin, but because she refuses to be anyone's *pet*. She says: 'When I saw Tess tied into that coffle [...] I thought, that could be me – standing there with a rope around my neck waiting to be led away like someone's dog! [...] I'm not property, Kevin. I'm not a horse or a sack of wheat' (*Kindred*, 246). She has decided that her sexuality is her own, and that as long as she has that, she will still be somewhat free, although the rest of her body is tied to Rufus with an invisible bond, and that she cannot escape the life as a slave while she is in Maryland. This new-found significance of sexuality makes it even more important to her to escape from Rufus when he threatens to rape her. I will return to this in the end of the chapter.

Fear and humiliation are two highly influential regulatory power mechanisms, but I have yet to discuss the most powerful mechanism of them all – the psychological device of divide and conquer. Before I return to this mechanism, I will discuss how the treatment of black people influences Rufus's attitude and performativity.

3.6 The Construction of Race

3.6.1 The Birth of an Oppressor

Kindred does not only demonstrate the forces behind the formation of black identities, but also the coming of age of a white oppressor. Rufus's performativity is influenced by the same regulatory practices that control the slaves' performativity. The way the slaves are treated and subdued has an effect on the way the white people see themselves. Because 'black' is seen in opposition to 'white', and 'slave' as opposed to 'master', the white people could use the black slaves as the meter upon which they could measure themselves, as their contraries. This dichotomous thinking justifies and sustains oppression because it implies that it is a natural law for one to dominate the 'Other'. Furthermore, it is the oppressor that is in charge of defining the oppressed, regardless of how this 'Other' actually is. Black feminist bell hooks writes:

As subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history. As objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity created by others, one's history named only in ways that define one's relationship to those who are subjects. (hooks, *Talking back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, 42. Quoted in Collins, 69)

I have already shown an example of the process of defining the 'Other' with the rape of black women and the justification of it. And the 'knowledge' that formed regarding black women's sexuality has become an 'inevitable truth' for those who see themselves as the rulers of the world. The knowledge consequently shapes the formation of white people's identity, and the result is characters like Tom and Rufus Weylin who truly and utterly believe that they have all the right in the world to behave the way they do towards black people. Dana comments on Tom Weylin's performativity: 'His [Rufus's] father wasn't the monster he could have been with the power he held over his slaves. He wasn't a monster at all. Just an ordinary man who sometimes did the monstrous things his society said were legal and proper' (*Kindred*, 134). Rufus learns that as a white man, he can get away with anything he does towards women and black people. This becomes clear early, when he demonstrates how he can be abusive towards his mother, and she will still go out of her way to try to make him happy. Part of his 'education' is to learn how to use the slaves' fear and dehumanized

identity to his own advantage, and through observing and copying his father he manages to continue the oppression.

When Rufus is a little boy, Dana still feels affection and hope for him and believes that she might have a positive influence on him. However, as Rufus gets older and Dana discovers that he is no better than his father, the task that is put on her is heavier to bear every time she returns. The first time she realizes that he is ‘a man of his time’ (*Kindred*, 245), is when she comes back and he has just raped Alice for the first time: ‘I gazed down at him bitterly. Kevin had been right. I’d been foolish to hope to influence him. [...] Heaven help Alice and Isaac. Heaven help me. If Rufus could turn so quickly on a life-long friend, how long would it take him to turn on me?’ (*Kindred*, 123-4). However, the main problem Dana encounters in her relationship with Rufus is not that she hates him, but that she so easily forgives him for what he does to her, Alice and the other slaves. For a long time, she is very confused by her feelings for him and starts to doubt that she is loyal to the right people. These problematic feelings are closely connected to the way people around her constantly question the way she performs her blackness.

3.6.2 Performing Blackness

I mentioned earlier that the people Dana meets in the 1800’s are puzzled by the way she speaks, because she sounds more like a white man than a black woman. However, speech was a minor problem compared to the attitudes the other slaves had towards her because of her relationship to white men. First of all, there is a problem that she is in love with a white man. Alice accuses her of betraying her own kind because of her warm feelings for Kevin: ‘You ought to be ashamed of yourself, whining and crying after some poor white trash of a man, black as you are’ (*Kindred*, 165). Secondly, and more importantly, she is often accused of being disloyal to the other slaves because of her closeness to Rufus, because she always saves his life and gets away with talking to him as if he was an equal. Dana’s main problem is that even if she in many ways starts to *perform* (in J. Butler’s sense) the slave that she initially was *acting*, she is not following the rules completely. The other slaves have discovered the importance of *acting* in accordance with the white people’s definitions of them when they are in the presence of a white person, but still be themselves around other black people. Luke explains this to his son, Nigel: “‘Don’t argue with white folks,” he said. “Don’t tell them ‘no.’ Don’t let them see you mad. Just say ‘yes, sir.’ Then go ‘head and do

what you want to do.”’ (*Kindred*, 96). Sarah’s daughter Carrie is the only one of her children that was not sold because she is mute, and therefore Weylin believed her to be an imbecile. A comment from Kevin reveals that this is an image she maintains around white people, although she is actually a bright girl:

‘I talked to Carrie about it once, and she said...’ ‘Carrie?’ He [Kevin] looked at me strangely. ‘Yes. She said...Oh. She gets her meaning across, Kevin. Weren’t you around the place long enough to find that out?’ ‘She never tried to get much across to me. I used to wonder whether she was a little retarded.’ ‘God no! Far from it. If you had gotten to know her, you wouldn’t even suspect.’ (*Kindred*, 242)

This *act* the black people put on in front of the whites is also described in Collins’ *Black Feminist Thought* as a strategy of resistance, used by black women, also in modern times:

Black women domestic workers report that they are often called by their white employers to play roles as deferent, contented servants grateful for handouts of old clothes in place of decent wages. But these women simultaneously resist these ongoing attempts to dehumanize them. The childlike, obedient servants they pretend to be masks a very different analysis and worldview. The women share stories of acting grateful for the handouts given them by their employers while throwing away the things as soon as they leave their jobs. (Collins, 142)

Because *the obedient, subhuman slave* is only an act, the black population manages to distance themselves from the whites, and this is where Dana makes a mistake; she treats Rufus the same way as she treats everybody else. Collins describes how the black women are resisting the identity and rules of performativity that are placed upon them by the white majority, and instead they create their own rules. Just like Luke explains to Nigel: in order to get one’s way, it is better to *pretend* to be like the white’s stereotypical black, because that will make them feel safe and less suspicious. This routine may however seem like an oxymoronic way of gaining rights, and should be completely futile if fighting racism is the goal. Judith Butler’s theory says that it is the reiterated acts that constitute our performativity, and that these acts not only *come from* discourse, but they also *create* and *maintain* discourse. From this follows that the performances the black people put on because of the discourse that was originally created by whites, will at the same time be the reason it is upheld. If everyone continues to act in accordance with the rules that are set for them, even if they are only pretending, how is that image supposed to change? When this performance is perceived by the majority as performativity, what effect will this have on the new generations of blacks and whites?

One must bear in mind that the women Collins refers to have only one way of surviving, and that is by keeping their jobs. In order to do so, they must do what they are told, and not be troublesome. In this way, they are very much in the same situation as the slaves. They have to work in order to feed themselves and their children, and if they are ‘difficult’, for example by asking for rights and in other ways acting differently from what they *should* in the eyes of their white employers, they would lose their jobs. Instead, these women can put on an act and thus be almost invisible around whites, but create their own discourse and identity around their own, away from those who see them as ‘Others’. Collins writes:

Black women have insisted on our right to define our own reality, establish our own identities, and name our history. (Collins, 70)

The Black female sphere of influence created in this case was Black women’s refusal to relinquish control over their self-definitions. While they pretend to be mules and mammies and thus appear to conform to institutional rules, they resist by creating their own self-definitions and self-valuations in the safe space they create among one another. (Collins, 142)

The next step would be to bring their children up with these self-definitions, and influence them to get an education and better jobs, and thus make sure their future is more optimistic. The ultimate goal would be for black men and women to not have to put up an act anymore, because they can *be someone* based on their own definitions, and the white population will have had to change their ideas about black people as something other than themselves.

The slaves Dana meets are the pioneers of this type of activism. Before her experiences in Maryland, Dana does not seem to comprehend the effect of working against the white supremacists under cover of being the stereotypical black *mule*. Dana was born into a time with possibilities and choices. She has to a very little degree felt the pressure of doing what is necessary for survival. All her foremothers – and forefathers – have worked hard and slowly towards a better life for the future generations, but instead of understanding and appreciating what they have sacrificed for the hope of a better future, Dana feels embarrassment for the black identity they have come to represent. Her lack of awareness is further a consequence of detaching herself from her black roots. Instead of getting to know her past, she used the first opportunity to break with her family, and thus remove herself further from the environment that could have helped her to find a black identity that she would be comfortable with. The road to the modern era of opportunities for black people has been forgotten, and Octavia Butler noticed this in her own feelings of embarrassment about

her mother, which I mentioned in chapter one, and in the attitude of contemporary black youth. She therefore found it necessary to create Dana, take her away from her comfortable sphere in modern California and send her to the past so that she could see who had ensured her existence and by what means this had been possible.

Because she has never experienced the necessity of performing the stereotype, Dana refuses to appear less clever than she is in front of white people, especially around Rufus.

Consequently, she is accused of believing she is white, both by Rufus *and* the other slaves:

“‘You think you’re white!’” he [Rufus] muttered. “‘You don’t know your place any better than a wild animal.’” (*Kindred*, 164). Alice says: ‘You always try to act so white. White nigger, turning against your own people!’ (*Kindred*, 165). After a while, Dana begins to feel that she *is* a traitor, especially when Rufus repeatedly demonstrates what sort of man he is and she continuously forgives him. Dana experiences that other slaves do not trust her; they will for example stop their conversation when she is nearby. One day she tells Carrie about her feelings: ‘I guess I can see why there are those who think I’m more white than black.’ (*Kindred*, 224). Carrie tries to comfort her in her own, mute language. She shows Dana that when she rubs her skin, the black colour does not come off, as it does on her sign for ‘white people’. Her husband Nigel explains: “‘She means it doesn’t come off, Dana,” he said quietly. “The black. She means the devil with people who say you’re anything but what you are.’” (*Kindred*, 224). Carrie makes her see that by saving Rufus, she is also helping his slaves, because without him, they will all be sold. What Carrie says gives Dana the support she needs to keep going, and she realizes that what she does to survive is no different from what the other slaves do, and it does not make her less black.

3.7 Divide and Conquer

I mentioned that Dana also struggles with conflicting feelings regarding her closeness to Rufus. During a yearly harvest feast that Rufus holds for his slaves, she discovers that she is not the only one with mixed emotions when it comes to their master:

Strangely, they seemed to like him, hold him in contempt, and fear him all at the same time. This confused me because I felt just the same mixture of emotions for him myself. I had thought my feelings were complicated because he and I had such a strange relationship. But then, slavery of any kind fostered strange relationships. (*Kindred*, 229-30)

These contradictory emotions are a good indication that the Western system of dichotomy is inadequate, because the world is not made of opposites; it is more complex than that. One has to consider more aspects of a situation to understand it, and as Judith Butler argues, the study of performativity and discourse gives a fuller, more detailed version of life and identity.

After the talk she has with Carrie, and the observations she makes at the harvest feast, Dana seems more confident about her racial identity. When the field hand Sam comments on how many of the others slaves perceive her, Dana talks back:

‘Some folks say...’ ‘Hold on.’ I was suddenly angry. ‘I don’t want to hear what “some folks” say. “Some folks” let Fowler drive them into the fields every day and work them like mules.’ ‘Let him...?’ ‘Let him! They do it to keep the skin on their backs and breath in their bodies. Well, they’re not the only ones who have to do things they don’t like to stay alive and whole. Now you tell me why that should be so hard for “some folks” to understand?’ (*Kindred*, 238)

Sam does admit that other slaves are jealous of her, because they believe that she is better off than them.

What is demonstrated here is probably the most efficient power mechanism of them all: divide and conquer. As long as the slaves are treated differently, they will never unite, and never stand together against the suppressors. By creating a hierarchy amongst the slaves, jealousy instead of solidarity will rule, and the oppressed will blame each other for the wrong that is done to them. It is in this hierarchy that some slaves are accused of being ‘white niggers’. One result of the creation of this hierarchy is the story with Liza who told Weylin about Dana’s attempted escape. Liza’s life had deteriorated after Alice took her place in the household, so she revenged this, but took it out on Dana, not on Weylin himself. Another example is when Sam is sold. Everyone seems to know that he is sold because of his friendship with Dana, so instead of directing their anger and hatred towards Rufus, the person behind the sale, Sam’s sister attacks Dana:

‘You whore!’ she screamed. She had not been permitted to approach the coffin, but she approached me. ‘You no-‘count nigger whore, why couldn’t you leave my brother alone!’ She would have attacked me. And field hand that she was, strengthened by hard work, she would probably have given me the beating she thought I deserved. (*Kindred*, 238)

Sarah later tells Dana that Alice had knocked this woman out to protect her (*Kindred*, 250),

just as she had beaten Liza up for what she did to her (*Kindred*, 179). Thus, it becomes clear that the fear of losing one's place in the hierarchy and jealousy and hatred towards those higher up on the ladder, are key factors in the mechanisms that keep the slaves under control. This system thus seems to keep the slaves more occupied with accusing and punishing one another than to be vindictive towards the white people, who were largely outnumbered by the black population on the plantation.

Dana, on the other hand, again demonstrates how she is different from the others. Rufus discovers early that the most efficient means he may apply to control Dana is that she cares about the other slaves. One reason why Dana is not as easy to control through the fear of losing her place on the hierarchy as the other slaves is because no matter the circumstances, Dana has never told Rufus that he will become her great great-grandfather. Because he wants her to continue to help him in times of need, Rufus believes that he is more dependent on Dana than she depends on him. Therefore, she can get away with more than the other slaves, and he does not dare to abuse her sexually. Dana tries to explain it to Kevin: 'He has to leave me enough control of my own life to make living look better than killing and dying' (*Kindred*, 246). However, part of his 'education' towards becoming a slave master is to be imaginative about methods of manipulation. Rufus discovers early that Dana's weak point is her benevolence, and he uses this knowledge to make sure she will continue to rescue him, even when he knows that she will rather see him dead: 'He had already found the way to control me – by threatening others. That was safer than threatening me directly, and it worked. It was a lesson he had no doubt learned from his father' (*Kindred*, 169).

In her article 'Blood, Genes and Gender' Nancy Jesser writes that Octavia Butler has recently been criticized for creating heroines that follow the stereotypical female trait of self sacrifice for the benefit of the community and that this is presented as biological traits connected to women: 'Her heroines [...] always act as mothers and caretakers against their own self-interest'. Jesser continues: 'Butler's heroines act, however, according to biologically coded imperatives and in line with recent evolutionary biological theories of gender' (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb1421/is_1_43/ai_n28920657/). Jesser argues that this biological approach to womanhood runs contrary to the feminist idea of the situated body – the idea that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' and simultaneously contradicts Judith Butler's theory on performativity. I disagree with Jesser. There are really no specific clues in *Kindred* that support the view that the heroine Dana acts selflessly and motherly because she is biologically disposed for this. Most of the time one could argue that

she acts *selfishly*, because her main target throughout the novel is to make sure that Hagar will be born in order to ensure her own existence.

Nevertheless, for a while it seems as if Dana can never be free from the slavery that has been put on her, even after her great great-grandmother Hagar is born. Rufus repeatedly reminds her that if he dies, all the slaves will be sold, and it would be her fault: 'If you think that little sale was bad [...] you better make sure nothing happens to me [...] Do you know what would happen to the people here if I died?' (*Kindred*, 226). When he later sells Sam because he showed interest in Dana, Rufus demonstrates that he is not just full of empty threats. However, as I mentioned earlier, when it comes to their master-slave relationship, Dana has a limit: she will not let Rufus take advantage of her sexually, and after Hagar is born, Dana's need to be in control of her own sexuality is what finally pushes her to break free from Rufus.

3.8 The Sexuality That Frees You

After Alice dies, Rufus can no longer control his feelings towards Dana. Up until this point in his life, Dana has been an asexual figure, his friend, mother, nurse and guardian angel. Without Alice there to relieve him of his sexual needs, Dana becomes his natural target. On Dana's last trip, Rufus tries to manipulate her into relinquishing the connections she has to the other slaves and her black identity, and instead embrace the relationship he offers her. After Alice's funeral, they spend several days almost as a family. Rufus and Dana eat together, Dana takes care of his and Alice's children, and she voluntarily spends time in his mother's company. Rufus is starting to believe that he can have the life he wanted with Alice, with Dana, and he is ready to make the next step: to make Dana sleep with him. This is where Dana demonstrates how much she has changed during her time in Maryland. Rufus tries to destabilize her by telling her that the field hands think she is a traitor, and that Alice had agreed with Tom Weylin when he said Dana was 'the kind of black who watches and thinks and makes trouble' (*Kindred*, 255). When Rufus also mentions that his mother used to close her eyes and imagine that Dana is white, she puts her foot down and says: 'I'm black, [...] And when you sell a black man away from his family just because he talked to me, you can't expect me to have any good feelings toward you' (*Kindred*, 256). Dana thus shows that the insecure feelings she had about where she belongs and where her loyalties lie are gone.

She has started to believe in herself in a new way because she is more confident about who she is.

After Rufus fails to put her up against the other slaves, he tries to exploit Dana's benevolent nature again, as he mentions the children to persuade her to stay: 'They should be your children now [...] If you had any feelings for them, you'd stay' (*Kindred*, 257). Dana still refuses to promise him the life he wants. When his strategy of talking her into sleeping with him voluntarily falls short, Rufus chooses a more violent approach. On the floor in the attic, with a knife in her hand and Rufus clutching her arm, Dana suddenly finds herself contemplating her options. For a while it seems as if she will let Rufus have his way with her, and continue the life they have started on the farm. That alternative would have been out of the question at an earlier stage. After her second trip, Dana discussed the threat of rape with Kevin, and claimed that she could never endure such a thing and could easily kill – herself or others – in order to escape:

'To survive, my ancestors had to put up with more than I ever could. Much more. You know what I mean. [...] Oh, but I am talking about suicide, Kevin – suicide or worse. For instance, I would have used your knife against that patroller last night if I'd had it. I would have killed him.' (*Kindred*, 51)

The fact that she considers becoming Rufus' concubine demonstrates how much her mindset has changed during her time as a slave. Although she still is horrified by the thought, she has started to believe that to let him have her is the only thing she can do, because to stab that knife into him and kill him suddenly feels like the least preferable option: 'I realized how easy it would be for me to continue to be still and forgive him even this. So easy, in spite of all my talk. But it would be so hard to raise the knife, drive it into the flesh I had saved so many times. So hard to kill...' (*Kindred*, 260). Her biggest fear, which initially was to be raped, now seems to be the prospect of killing her 'master'. Nevertheless, the idea of ending up like Tess, first used as a sex-toy, only to end up in chains and sold, is still so repulsive and frightening that it shakes her out of the powerless state she is in and helps her defend the part of her that she can still call her own – her sexuality. She stabs Rufus to death and as he dies, Dana comes back home to her own time, but the arm Rufus was clutching is stuck in the brick wall of their living room.

3.9 Summing Up

In this chapter I have discussed how Dana performativity and idea of self changes during her time in Maryland. First I discussed how the novel depicts the concept of hailing when I analysed Dana's early performance right after she discovers where she is and at what time. Next, I explained how Dana first pretends to be a slave, then how the intersection of power mechanisms such as fear, humiliation and the construction of a hierarchy among the slaves influence Dana so that her initial acting becomes performativity when she starts to think like a slave. I have also discussed how *Kindred* questions dichotomous thinking through the portrayals of complex relationships between the slaves and their master, between the black concubine and the white rapist and among the slaves in the black community on the plantation.

Modern day people typically believe that they are immune to the influences of archaic institutions such as slavery, because of all the knowledge we have today of what is 'right and wrong'. Because slavery is in the past and thus distant from us, it is easy to judge people for being weak or unintelligent. Octavia Butler has brilliantly used Dana as an example of how easy it is to be persuaded into doing things one would think were impossible. Dana's experiences in the antebellum South demonstrate how powerful regulatory practices are in controlling our performativity when it comes to sexuality and race, thus detailing and expanding Judith Butler's attempts at theorizing performativity.

4. After

In chapter two I depicted Dana as a woman who had detached herself from her sexuality, womanhood and blackness, which are three crucial parts of one's identity if we are to believe Judith Butler. According to Patricia Collins, race, gender, sexuality and class are axes on the matrix of domination. Being a black woman implies being triply oppressed, because in the traditional, Western system, white men and their attitudes have dominated the discourse, and have become a measure of normality. On the social ladder, black women typically come fourth; after white men, white women and black men. Collins argues that an important task in black feminist philosophy therefore is to analyse how the intersection of race, gender, sexuality and class works in oppression, especially in order to understand black women's situation and self-definitions¹. Such analysis is necessary in order to create a self-definition that stems from real life experiences rather than being based on the controlling images that have been imposed upon black women by elite white men.

Self-definition and affirmation have traditionally been sought in 'Black women's relationship with one another' (Collins, 96), as black women are the only ones who can understand fully what it means to be a black woman. If a black woman isolates herself from her community like Dana was doing, it will be hard for her to construct a positive image to identify with. Because of the detachment from the black community Dana is unaware of important aspects of black history and black identity, which again has led her to disrespect her own 'kind' and thus an important part of her self. The trips to Maryland force Dana to seek contact with other black women and men, and in chapter three I discussed how she learns some important lessons about fear and pain, human relations, myths and real life situations and her own history, and I demonstrated how all this changed her performativity. In this short chapter I will discuss the result of Dana's interaction with the slaves at the Weylin farm, and the impact her experiences as a slave has on her life and self-definition when she continues her life in California in 1976.

¹ In this thesis, I believe that class and race in many ways overlap, and although that is not always the case, I have not paid special attention to the concept of class.

At the start of her journeys, Dana believes that her historical knowledge, books and modern ways of thinking will help her cope in the time of slavery. However, what she has read about slavery proves to be mostly wrong, and her predisposed ideas sometimes even endanger her; Rufus finds and burns the map she brings with her in case she tries to escape; and most importantly, she learns that survival and steering clear of another beating quickly become more important to her than to follow her principles. During her trips, Dana learns that there is nothing in her education or modern upbringing that can help her change history. In fact, the opposite happens: history changes her. Dana's attempt to influence Rufus is overpowered by the education he gets from the regulatory practices in his society; after the first time she is whipped, she does not dare to continue teaching children to read and write; all her planning prior to her attempted escape is futile as she overestimate the solidarity among the slaves; and instead of saving her great great-grandmother from being raped, Dana contributes to it. A paradox is that Dana in Maryland is compelled to do all the occupations she had rejected so persistently in her own time. She is a nurse for both Rufus and Alice; she becomes a teacher for slave children; and she works as a secretary and accountant for Rufus. Thus, in antebellum Maryland, power mechanisms such as fear, repetitive work, manipulation and humiliation quickly transform even this strong, independent woman from being a compassionate idealist to think and perform like a slave. Hence, Dana learns that under different circumstances, some principles must give way to doing what is required in order to stay alive, but this does not mean that the submission is voluntarily, as she thought before she came to the Weylin plantation.

Dana's trips to Maryland do not only teach her about the mechanisms behind slavery. She also receives a lesson about black womanhood. At the Weylin farm, Dana finds herself amongst women who meet the stereotypical representations of black women I mentioned in chapter one. There is Sarah, who with all the children that has been taken from her fits the original image of the black 'welfare mother' – the breeder; Tess, the 'Jezebel', who is passed from bed to bed and who hopes that being cooperative will help her situation; and Alice, who with her aggressive behaviour and constant battle for her children's well being is a version of the 'matriarch'. Dana, with her close connection to Rufus, is several times accused of being a 'mammy'. The black women Dana is acquainted with during her trips could thus all be categorized into the four controlling images that have grown from the myths about black women. Through the contact with these women and her own encounters with life as a slave, Dana learns the truth behind the negative images. She realizes that the

images are false, that it is the power mechanisms around them that force the women into performing these roles. The images are neither characteristics that lie embedded in black women, nor do these women choose to identify with the four images. Dana observes that slave women were left with no choice, they were forced to do what was commanded, or they or their children would suffer.

When Dana is accused by the other slaves of being a 'white nigger', an 'Aunt' or 'mammy' – expressions which she up until her trips to Maryland had used herself to categorize those who she believed to be spineless cowards – she starts to question her own identity. She often struggles with understanding where her loyalties lie. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, for a while she is confused and worried about what everyone thinks of her. But then, because of what she learns during her time with Sarah, Carrie, Tess and Alice, she comes to terms with her self. She discovers that the mammy, the Jezebel and the matriarch are labels that have been created by whites in order to justify inhumane treatment of black women.

Moreover, the community's attitudes against her reveal that the images have been upheld by the mind-set of both whites *and* blacks. In her own time, Dana had avoided contact with other black women, so she had not experienced for herself the truth about the images, nor had she been interested in understanding. Through the interaction with the other slave women, Dana establishes the fact that they are not stereotypes, they are complex women, and they will not define themselves by the categories created by those who want to keep them under control. Collins writes: 'Black women's work and family experiences create the conditions whereby the contradictions between everyday experiences and the controlling images of Black womanhood become visible. Seeing the contradictions in the ideologies opens them up for demystification' (Collins, 93). Because of her friendship with Alice, Sarah, Carrie, and Tess, Dana may find a new interest in the black female community in her own time, and understand that there are other self-definitions to identify with than those created by white oppressors.

The relationship between Dana and Kevin after their time in the antebellum South is also worth mentioning. In chapter two, I commented that their marriage was endangered because they founded their relationship upon isolation from their relatives and a superficial agreement of equality between them instead of coming to terms with the past. I argued that the equality between them was superficial, because Kevin several times lets slip that he would prefer it if Dana was more eager to assist him with his need, and Dana reveals that she

is concerned that the discourse in Maryland may form Kevin into becoming a man of the time. Back in California, it turns out that Kevin, during his five years in the 1820's, had helped slaves escape on the Underground Railroad. Dana is relieved that his attitudes towards slavery and black people were still the same: 'I went to him with relief that surprised me. I hadn't realized how much I'd worried, even now, that I might not be "still me" as far as he was concerned' (*Kindred*, 192). Nevertheless, sometimes she notices a change in him: 'The expression on his face was like something I'd seen, something I was used to seeing on Tom Weylin. Something ugly' (*Kindred*, 194). He seems more aggressive and impatient, and he struggles to acclimatize to life in California. Dana wants to help him, but he refuses to open up to her, he does not want to discuss his feelings regarding the problems he has encountered. Because they fail to communicate, the past is still threatening to break up their union. However, because they have both have experienced so vividly the power relations that potentially could damage their interracial marriage, at some point they will be forced to discuss what they have been through, and hopefully overcome the difficulties together and come out stronger than they were before.

Nevertheless, the knowledge Dana has acquired regarding slavery and with that her sexual, gender and racial identity, does not come without a cost. I mentioned how Dana in the beginning of her stay in the 1800's felt like an observer and an actor. I then discussed how she gradually went from *acting* to *performing* (in Judith Butler's sense of the word). Eventually, Dana starts to feel more connected to the early 19th century than to her own time. This becomes especially clear when Dana realizes that the longer she stays in the 19th century, her life there becomes more real, whereas her life back home in 1976 California fades away. When she returns to 1976 after spending several months in the year 1824, she feels alienated: 'I felt as though I were losing my place here in my own time. Rufus's time was a sharper, stronger reality' (*Kindred*, 191). Kevin feels the same way about coming home after he has been left five years in the 1800's: 'I feel like this is just another stopover,' he said. 'A little less real than the others, maybe' (*Kindred*, 192). Both discover that they feel at home when they arrive at Weylin's farm. Kevin says: 'But in all my traveling, do you know the only time I ever felt relieved and eager to be going to a place?' Whereupon Dana replies: 'It was when you went back to Maryland'. And she continues: 'I felt it the last time Rufus called me. I've got no love at all for that place, but so help me, when I saw it again, it was so much like coming home that it scared me.' (*Kindred*, 192). Dana and Kevin's reactions to coming home suggest that their performativity has changed so much that they

feel that they more assimilated into the discourse of the early 19th century than their own time. After experiencing what their ancestors had to endure, their old lives seem so simple and sheltered.

Their feelings also imply that they long for an increased visibility of the past in their lives in 1976. They feel more isolated and alone than ever before, as they are the only people alive to have felt the impact of the institution of slavery on their bodies. This way *Kindred* advocates for a raised awareness regarding the complex history of slavery in contemporary discourse. This is emphasized by the symbolism in Dana's last return to California, which coincides with the bicentennial date for the United States as an independent country. In the national celebration of 4 July 1976 lies a disregard of the nation's violent history, and in *Kindred* Butler calls for attention to the importance of knowing the past, even though the truth may hurt and force people to change their behavioural patterns.

The feeling of being misplaced in her own time is unpleasant, but the physical damage which is done to Dana's body has an even more forceful impact on her life in 1976. Every time Dana returns to her own time, her body bears increasingly worse wounds and scars inflicted on her in Maryland. After the first trip, she feels pain on her back from when Rufus' mother hit her. The second time she returns, she has lost two teeth in the fight with a patroller who tried to rape her. The third time, she has been severely whipped, and the skin on her back is slashed and bleeds. Upon the forth return, she is still in pain from another vicious beating, and the fifth time she comes home she does so because she has cut her wrists. That is the first time they have to involve medical assistance in order to repair the damage. The last time she returns, when Dana finally manages to break free from Rufus and his time, her right arm is attached to her living-room wall. This time, Dana is hospitalized and her arm has to be amputated by the elbow.

Octavia Butler has commented that the loss of an arm was necessary, because she could not let Dana come home whole: 'I couldn't really let her come all the way back. I couldn't let her return to what she was, I couldn't let her come back whole and that, I think, really symbolizes her not coming back whole. Antebellum slavery didn't leave people quite whole' (Randall Kenan, 'An Interview With Octavia E. Butler', quoted in Crossley, 267). In *Remembering Generations* Ashraf Rushdy argues that Dana loses her arm because 'recovering the past involves losing a grip on the present' (Rushdy, 108). Rushdy further

states that by damaging Dana physically, Butler demonstrates the paradox of discovering the past. Additionally, the physical damage to Dana's body underlines the reality of the trips. The loss of an arm prevents the journeys to be explained away as metaphors, or the whole experience as a thought experiment. Instead, both the reader and Dana is forced grasp the seriousness regarding what happened during the time of slavery, and what impact this time has had for generations of black people. If Dana had come home unscarred, she would in time start to doubt that it had happened, eventually everything in her life would go back to normal, and she would consequently fail to recognize the importance of the lessons she had learned from the experience. On the one hand, the search for truth about her ancestors makes Dana a more whole person because she has changed important prejudiced notions she had nurtured concerning black people, and especially women. Her new knowledge will help her identification process, because she no longer needs to feel embarrassment about her gender, race or sexuality. On the other hand, the life she lived before she was first called to Maryland can never be recovered, because the knowledge she has acquired will change her forever. The scars and the loss of her arm ensure that she never forgets her time in the past, and she must learn how to live with her new handicap, and knowledge, in her own time.

Conclusion

I started out this thesis with explaining some of the main aspects of Judith Butler's theory of performativity, mostly as she presents it in her third book, *Bodies That Matter*. Key elements are the concept of interpellation or 'hailing' and the presence of regulatory norms and power mechanisms in the discourse of normativity. I explained how Butler demonstrates how resignification of traditional structures may be a means for change and empowerment, and discussed the way Butler attempts to include race and racializing interpellations in her analysis of performativity, but I argued that she only half succeeds with integrating race into her theory. I suggested that employing Judith Butler's theory in the analysis of the novel *Kindred* may be useful to understand better how race, sexuality and gender are all incorporated in the process of identity formation.

In chapter two, I pieced together an impression of *Kindred's* female protagonist. In order to understand her starting point before she was summoned to Maryland for the first time, it was helpful to analyse her performativity in her own time, California of the 1970's. The impression we are left with is that Dana was an independent, strong modern woman, but that she seemed to repress her sexuality, distance herself from her racial identity, and repudiate traditional feminine traits.

The third chapter is predominantly concerned with the changes in Dana's performativity while she is in the antebellum Maryland. I discussed how she seems to go through different stages. First, Dana is acting out her preconceptions of what a slave is, but gradually her acting becomes performativity as the regulatory forces in antebellum Maryland discourse start to influence her. Dana is whipped, beaten, threatened, and betrayed, and eventually she finds herself thinking and behaving like a slave.

In the final chapter, I discussed some of the consequences the trips to the past have on Dana's life when she returns to the 1970's. She has had to alter many of her prejudiced beliefs, especially regarding black women, and this new knowledge may help her developing a positive self definition. On the other hand, this knowledge has cost her numerous scars, and most significantly, her left arm. These physical changes will ensure that the past will always have an influence on her life, and force her to deal with what she has learned in her everyday life.

This thesis has applied Judith Butler's theory to literary work, which is somewhat unconventional, but absolutely rewarding, especially in order to comprehend the impact of performativity in identity formation in the society and in individuals. Furthermore, to use the concept of performativity as a starting point for an analysis of literature facilitates the process of recognizing and explaining character development. Although Octavia Butler did not employ the term 'performativity' herself, the power of regulatory practices is often a focus of attention in her literature, as demonstrated in this quote:

Beware, all too often we say what we hear others say. We think what we are told that we think. We see what we are permitted to see. Worse, we see what we are told that we see. Repetition and pride are the keys to this. To hear and to see even an obvious lie again and again and again, maybe to say it almost by reflex, and then to defend it because we have said it, and at last to embrace it because we've defended it. (Octavia Butler, 1998, from *Parable of the Talents*)

I included this quote as an epigraph, because I believe that it in many ways sums up and explains the concept of performativity. It is a warning against the combination of forces in our society and the nature of the human mind, which is obsessed with conformity and consistency. The quote is found in one of the last books Butler wrote before she died, and it reveals that awareness of the powerful mechanisms in the discourse around us was still a topic she was concerned with, twenty years after she wrote *Kindred*. In *Kindred*, Butler draws attention to the fact that the same kinds of cruelties that took place in the antebellum South still occurs in our 'enlightened' world. Dana mentions the riots in South Africa, where apartheid was still a part of the society, and she comments on how the South African whites of the 1970s would fit perfectly into the 18th and 19th centuries (*Kindred*, 196). There are also several associations in the novel to what happened to the Jews and other groups during World War II, only a few decades prior to when this novel was written.

I am writing this in the year 2009. One would expect the world to have put an end to all the inhumanity, wars and discrimination which have been plaguing human kind from ancient times. But because influential forces will always be there to manipulate people to think and act in accordance with hegemonic notions, history will be repeated, again and again, and the world may never change. However, it is possible to detect this pattern through a better understanding of history. In many ways, the modern world is a better place for many people, but one may still easily draw links from the issues raised in *Kindred* to the brutal aftermaths of the terrorist attack on New York in 2001. Again a certain 'race' has become the scapegoat

for everything that is evil in the world, at least from a Western point of view. Muslims living in the Western world are discriminated against; many have been pursued, tortured and imprisoned without a trial.

With this thesis, through Octavia Butler's novel and Judith Butler's theory of performativity, I am hoping to draw attention to how the regulatory forces are shaping the world around us. *Kindred* demonstrates how this was done in the Maryland of the 19th century, in the California of the 1970s and how they are still affecting us in our present day. The lesson learnt remains: If we keep forgetting or ignoring the regulatory forces in our society, how is it possible to resist them?

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